Commentary
April 2006

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Books in Review

Aaron L. Friedberg • Brian C. Anderson • Michael J. Lewis
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Commentary

Vol. 121 · April 2006 · No. 4

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COMMENTARY (ISSN 0010-2601) is published monthly (except for a combined July-August issue) by the American Jewish Committee. Editorial and business offices: 165 East 56th Street, New York, NY 10022. Telephone: (212) 891-1400. Fax: (212) 891-6700. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Letters intended for publication may be edited. Postmaster: Send address changes to COMMENTARY, PO Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142. **SUBSCRIPTIONS:** (800) 829-6270. Single copy is $5.95; one year $45, two years $79, three years $109. Add $11.00 per year for subscriptions to Canada, $19.00 per year for all other foreign destinations. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices.

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Indexed in *Reader's Guide*, *Book Review Digest*, and elsewhere. U.S. Newsstand Distribution by Eastern News Distributors Inc., 1130 Cleveland Rd., Sandusky, OH 44870. Printed in the U.S.A. All back issues are available in electronic form at **www.commentarymagazine.com**.

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Commentary
April 2006

Letters from Readers

Iraq

To the Editor:

Norman Podhoretz's "The Panic Over Iraq" [January] strikes me as a curious piece. He calls for patience in the face of daily reports of more and more American and Iraqi casualties—three years after President George W. Bush declared that "major combat operations in Iraq have ended"—but ultimately says little in defense of the administration's policy.

Mr. Podhoretz devotes most of his article to attacking his enemies, including such unlikely targets as Zbigniew Brzezinski, who supported Ronald Reagan's foreign policy, Brent Scowcroft, who served as President George H.W. Bush's national security adviser, Eliot A. Cohen, a neoconservative academic, and Congressman John Murtha, a hero of the Vietnam war. These policymakers he lumps together with the usual Podhoretz suspects: "op-ed writers" and other members of the "mainstream press," the "radical Left," "think tanks," familiar punching bags like Howard Dean and Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney, and just about everybody else in America who does not believe the war in Iraq is a nifty thing.

In an effort to excuse the administration's foul-ups in Iraq, Mr. Podhoretz mentions that "mistakes" were also made by Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Winston Churchill during World War II. Never mind that neither of those leaders elected to go to war or that both responded to one that was thrust upon them. President Bush, by contrast, initiated the war in Iraq, and his Pentagon began planning for it a year before he gave the order to strike. And although Mr. Podhoretz never details exactly what mistakes Roosevelt and Churchill made, or when, it is safe to assume that they did not make them three years after declaring the end of major combat operations.

The administration has dealt its apologists an awfully weak hand to play in defending its Iraq policy. Thus, to counter the charge that "no thought was given to what would happen once we got to Baghdad," Mr. Podhoretz can only write that much of what the administration *did* plan for did not occur. He does not answer—or even ask—the relevant question, which is why no one planned for the predictable collapse of governmental authority, widespread looting, the breakdown of infrastructure, the random killing of civilians, tribal conflicts, and power-grabbing by local militias.

Three years after the American invasion, the lights are still out in Baghdad, people line up to buy gasoline, and the trial of Saddam Hussein has been postponed because of the assassination of prosecutors and judges. More than 2,000 American troops and over 23,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed, and many more have been wounded. If all this were not bad enough, a draft government report on the administration's much-ballyhooed reconstruction effort describes it as having been hobbled from the outset by gross understaffing, lack of technical expertise, bureaucratic infighting, and constantly rising security costs.

Undaunted, Mr. Podhoretz claims that per-capita income in Iraq is now 30-percent higher than it was before the war. He fails to mention that the cost of living has gone up, too. Moreover, most of the money that has flowed through the Iraqi economy is simply a byproduct of the billions of dollars the U.S. has poured into the country—most of it going to American contractors on no-bid contracts, such as with Halliburton and other companies with close ties to the administration. When Mr. Podhoretz tells us what has been built

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in Iraq since the war, he fails to mention all that was destroyed during the war and has yet to be replaced. In any case, increasing the per-capita income of Iraqis who dare to work for Americans and replacing infrastructure destroyed by the war are not why we went to Iraq.

Once it was determined that Saddam Hussein's regime did not have chemical and biological weapons, had not sought to purchase significant quantities of uranium from Africa, and had not cooperated with al-Qaeda terrorists, the administration came up with democracy-building as its post-hoc justification for the war. Who can be against democracy? But Mr. Podhoretz's claim that the Bush administration is making the Middle East safe for America by "making it safe for democracy" is sadly delusional.

He points to what he terms the "first seriously contested elections in Egypt" as an example of progress in this regard. But what really happened? The only effective opposition to President Hosni Mubarak's National Democratic Party was the radical-Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, an illegal organization barred from fielding a presidential candidate. The candidate of the secular-liberal Ghad party took 8 percent of the vote, only to be met with what American officials have described as false criminal charges and a sentence to five years of forced labor. Meanwhile, Mubarak has begun his sixth six-year term as president.

It goes downhill from there. The cedar revolution in Lebanon, which Mr. Podhoretz also trumpets, has little to do with Western-style democracy, but was a reaction to the Syrian-planned assassination of Lebanon's former prime minister, Rafik Hariri. If democracy were truly on the march in the Middle East, who would be the likely election winners: the liberal/democratic/secular parties, or the likes of Hamas, Hizballah, and the Muslim Brotherhood? The recent victory of Hamas in the Palestinian elections is instructive on this point.

Thanks to the Bush administration's war, Iraq has become a magnet for terrorists and would-be terrorists. Many of them are Sunni Arabs from other countries who have flocked to Iraq to fight the "infidels." President Bush's response, "better there than here," misses the point. The number of terrorists is not fixed; our actions in Iraq have materially swelled the ranks of those willing to die for jihad. Yet Mr. Podhoretz tells us we are winning the war politically. I and most Americans wish this were true, but the reality is that (to quote Donald Rumsfeld) "the harder we work, the behinder we get."

Mr. Podhoretz rests his assertion on two achievements: the adoption of the Iraqi constitution and three rounds of elections. I wish I could be as sanguine. The Iraqi constitution is just a piece of paper, one that incidentally adopts *shari'a* as the supreme law in the land. Prime Minister Ibraham al-Jaafari has ties to the radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, whose militia thugs battled U.S. Marines in late 2004 for control of Falluja. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani pulls the political strings in the Shiite-led government, a fact that does not inspire confidence in a democratic future for Iraq—throughout history, the Shiites have been intolerant of others, including fellow Muslims who are Sunni—and makes the prospect of a rapprochement between Iraq and Iran no longer remote.

The question is not just who is winning the war, as Mr. Podhoretz poses it, but whether we are safer, more secure, and better able to defend ourselves today than before we invaded Iraq. Most Americans say no, and for good reason. Faced with such burdensome challenges in Iraq, the administration has abandoned the field elsewhere in the world, leaving the growing nuclear threat in Iran to be solved by our European allies, turning over North Korea's nuclear threat for China to work out, and ignoring Vladimir Putin's anti-democratic power grab in Russia. Meanwhile, the administration's policies in Iraq have strained relations with America's traditional allies.

As for the larger war on terror, Osama bin Laden is alive and taunting the American public on al-Jazeera, despite Bush's vow to capture him, "dead or alive." In filling homeland-security jobs, political loyalty has meant more to the administration than loyalty to country. The administration has trampled on the civil rights of the American people by illegally eavesdropping on the conversations of ordinary citizens without any reasonable suspicion that they could be related to terrorism. We have been learning about detention centers operated by the CIA in foreign countries, of atrocities in Abu Ghraib—carried out, it now seems, on orders from on high—and of the use of military commissions, not courts, to determine the guilt or innocence of detained suspects.

Human rights were once high on the list of priorities for neoconservatives, when the Soviet Union was Enemy Number One. But now Mr. Podhoretz tells us that it is okay to ignore the human rights of those we oppose in Iraq (and at home) and in the larger war on terror. There is no other explanation for his suggestion that our interrogation of suspected terrorists has been limited to "accepted methods." Torture is outside the limits set by the Geneva Convention, to which the U.S. is a party. Human rights apply across the board—even when we deal with the enemy. They are what we fight for when we fight for American values.

Following President Bush and Vice President Cheney, Mr. Podhoretz suggests that people are "either with us or against us," patriots or traitors. This rhetoric may be effective politically in the short term, as it was in the 2004 presidential election, but in the long run Iraq is likely to be the death knell for the ideologues bent on using American military power to bring down regimes that do not pose a serious security threat to our country.

AMBASSADOR ALFRED H. MOSES
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

I do not know why Norman Podhoretz lumps me in with liberal intellectuals who, having once supported the war in Iraq, are now running for the exits. Liberal intellectual I doubtless am, "sunshine soldier" I am

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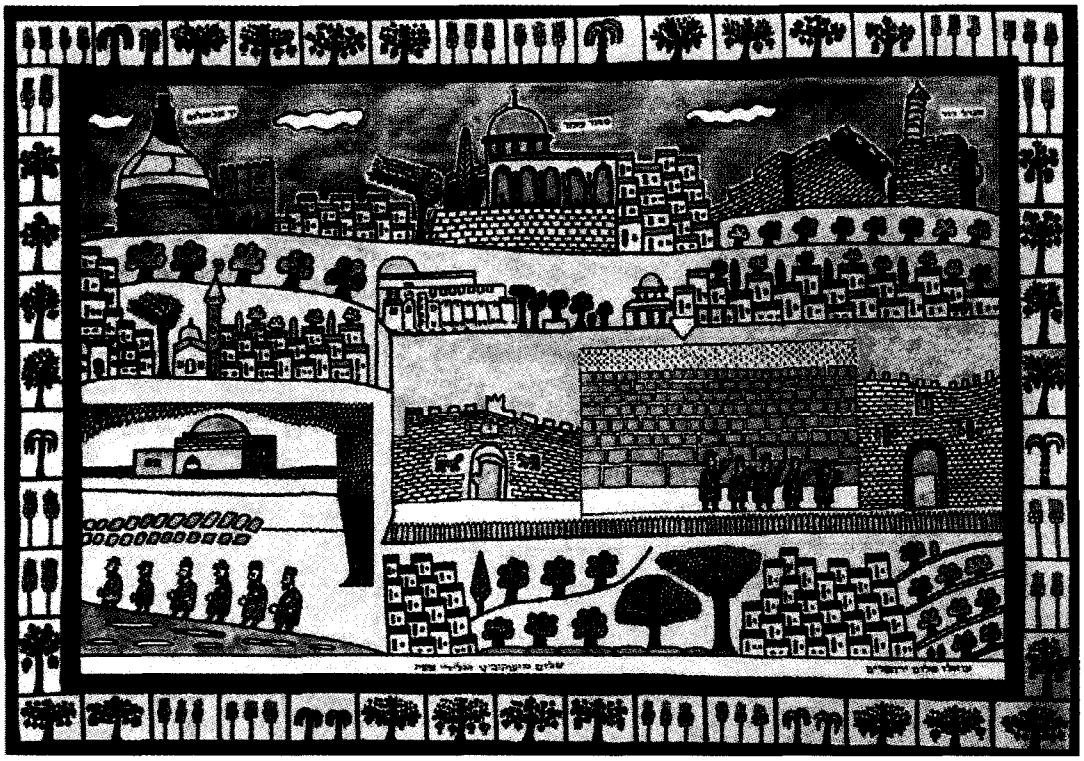

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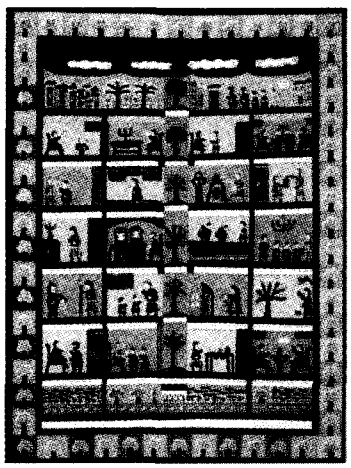

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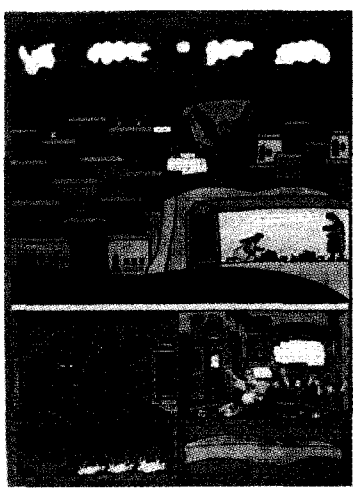

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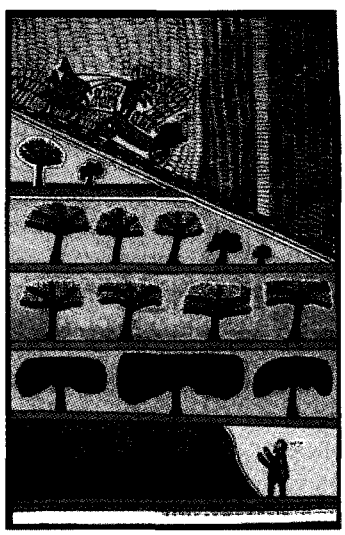

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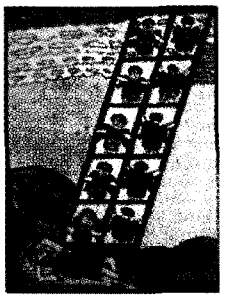

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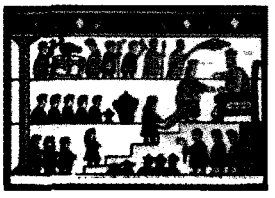

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most emphatically not. To the contrary, I opposed the Iraq war before it began ("a war too far" was what I called it in a piece by George Packer profiling liberals who had been hawks over Bosnia), just as I oppose it now.

DAVID RIEFF
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

In a series of articles in COMMENTARY, Norman Podhoretz has defended the Bush Doctrine and the President's actions in Iraq. In his latest installment, Mr. Podhoretz presents areas of alleged progress in Iraq and asks: "Why is there so little public awareness of these things?" He does not consider that the American public might have concluded, on its own, that it no longer accepts any of the numerous rationales for the invasion of Iraq, including the need to bring democracy to the region. Instead, Mr. Podhoretz creates the scapegoat of the "mainstream media" (MSM), with its enormous negative influence in shaping public attitudes.

Specifically, Mr. Podhoretz cites the MSM's penchant for negative views of the situation on the ground in Iraq. Such behavior, which fuels the "frenzied calls for the withdrawal of our forces," is motivated, he says, by a desire to pull off "the proverbial feat of snatching an American defeat from the jaws of victory." But Mr. Podhoretz seems to be attributing more influence to the MSM than can be justified. I find it difficult to believe that its influence equals or exceeds that of the many conservative media outlets across the country.

Despite the efforts of Mr. Podhoretz and others, President Bush has one of the lowest approval ratings of any President in recent years—primarily due to the situation in Iraq. The "panic," if there is one, must be among his supporters as well as his detractors.

SHELDON F. GOTTLIEB
Boynton Beach, Florida

TO THE EDITOR:

In mapping the domestic forces of the "Vietnam syndrome" that have undermined American leadership in the global war against Islamofascism, Norman Podhoretz recalls for me the thought of the great military historian Carl von Clausewitz. Clausewitz characterized the essence of war as a protracted contest of wills, from which it follows that whatever weakens one's own will strengthens the foe's. That President Bush and his senior military have absorbed Clausewitz's axiom is evident in their repeated assertions that, given the strength of our military and the soundness of our political strategy, a failure of national will is the only factor that could lead to an American defeat in Iraq.

Mr. Podhoretz's comparison with the Vietnam experience is indeed apposite, for among the many factors that enabled a determined Hanoi to prevail against the powerful American military, arguably the most decisive was the stunning success of the radical Left in dividing the American house against itself. Today, despite the many successes in Iraq that Mr. Podhoretz enumerates, America's noxious self-hating weed has clearly reemerged.

The Vietnam syndrome will likely die hard among policy elites vested in the flawed paradigms and assumptions in which they were schooled, even following a victory in Iraq. Israel will always be the "core problem" of the Middle East for a realist like Brent Scowcroft or an internationalist like Zbigniew Brzezinski, as Mr. Podhoretz observes. More generally, realism, conceived as "politics among nation-states," cannot see why a trans-state Islamist ideology poses a mortal threat to the free world. Nor can liberal internationalism comprehend that a security policy required to pass John Kerry's "global test" of unanimous approval is hopelessly paralyzed in a world of radically disparate interests.

Iraq is not the last of the Clausewitzian challenges American leadership will need to meet. Iran is looming.

MICHAEL BALCH
Iowa City, Iowa

TO THE EDITOR:

Thank you for Norman Podhoretz's excellent article. I happened to read it the day after 11 million Iraqi voters, including a great many Sunnis, showed up at the polls to vote in parliamentary elections. It was typical that my edition of the *New York Times* gave this story no attention on the front page and only a slightly positive appreciation in the international section. What is wrong with this picture?

J.M. BATTEAU
The Hague, The Netherlands

TO THE EDITOR:

I came to Australia from Poland when I was seventeen, two years before the Berlin Wall came down. When I started getting seriously interested in politics, Norman Podhoretz's writings helped convince me that neoconservatism came closest to my personal sentiments. Thus, as a very humble intellectual disciple, I was honored to be mentioned in his article for my blog tracking the good news from Iraq as well as the distortions perpetrated by mainstream media coverage of events in that country. It is good to know that good people are continuing the fight for victory in Iraq, and I am glad that some of my past work has provided them with useful ammunition.

ARTHUR CHRENKOFF
Canberra, Australia

NORMAN PODHORETZ writes:

Let me begin by correcting a few of Alfred H. Moses' egregious misrepresentations of what I actually wrote in "The Panic Over Iraq."

First of all, while I most certainly did attack Zbigniew Brzezinski, Brent Scowcroft, and John Murtha, I just as certainly did not attack Eliot A. Cohen. All I did was to take respectful issue with him on a couple of points. Ambassador Moses' inability to perceive—or perhaps his unwillingness to acknowledge—this distinction is of a piece with his generally sloppy account of my article. If, for example, he had bothered to read it a little more carefully, he could not possibly have called Brzezinski, Scowcroft, and Murtha "unlikely targets" of an article whose purpose was to take on the whole spectrum of opposition to the battle of Iraq. The same carelessness is evident in his allegation that I never

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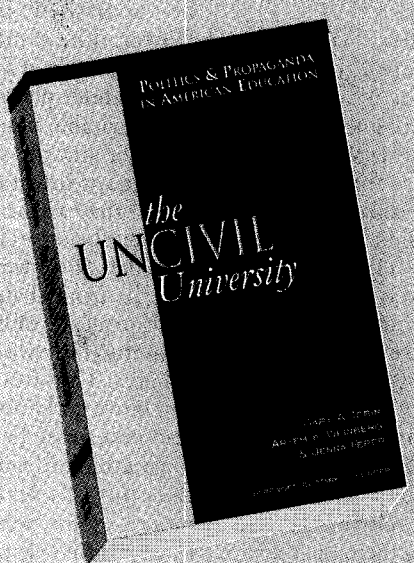

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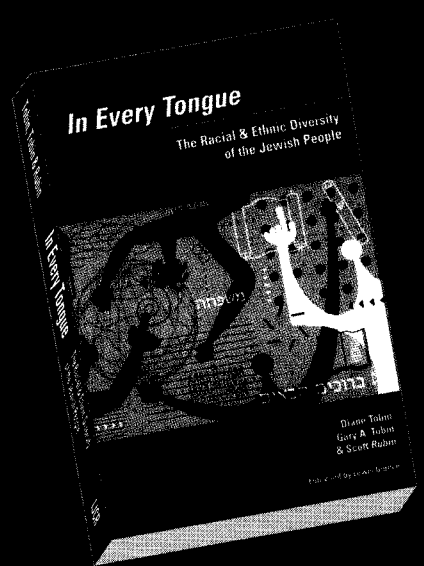

In Every Tongue

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spelled out the mistakes made by Roosevelt and Churchill in World War II, when in fact I cited a long list of them. And he is guilty not only of carelessness but also of something worse when—on the basis of my incontrovertible statement that there is a campaign to "define torture down to the point where it would become illegal to subject even a captured terrorist to generally accepted methods of interrogation"—he accuses me of believing that "it is okay to ignore the human rights of those we oppose."

For the rest, I could hardly have hoped for a better illustration than Ambassador Moses' letter of the kind of syndrome I was describing. Like his fellow opponents of what we are trying to do in Iraq and in the broader Middle East, he paints an insistently negative picture, disregarding or dismissing or denigrating any and all of the signs of progress to which I pointed and which have become evident even to a formerly anti-American Arab radical like Walid Jumblatt ("It's strange for me to say it, but this process of change has started because of the American invasion of Iraq"). Like virtually all of his fellow Democrats, Ambassador Moses places the Bush Doctrine in the blackest possible light, accusing its author of every imaginable sin both of conception and of execution, and sparing not a single talking point in the endlessly reiterated and wildly exaggerated Democratic litany of evils both real and imagined (Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, Halliburton, "illegal eavesdropping," etc., etc., etc.). Like most other Democrats, too, he will not grasp how Iraq fits into the larger war against Islamofascism, or trouble himself to consider the role it plays in the strategy to make the Middle East safe for America by making it safe for democracy.

I am writing this in late February, at a moment when things look dismal for that strategy. Iraq is said to be (though I doubt that it is) on the possible brink of civil war, and the electoral success of radical Islamist parties in Egypt and the Palestinian Authority have demonstrated that the Middle East is very far indeed from being made safe for democracy.

Not surprisingly, these developments have swollen the ranks of the summer soldiers and sunshine patriots, even among neoconservatives who at first strongly supported the invasion of Iraq. The prime example is Francis Fukuyama, but a few others also seem to be on the brink of giving up. As for the more traditional conservatives like William F. Buckley, Jr. and George Will, who had serious doubts from the beginning but were, out of a sense of solidarity, relatively reluctant to express them too forcefully, they have now cast off all reticence and unambiguously declared that we have lost in Iraq and that the Bush Doctrine is a failure.

Although such conservatives are understandably doing so with a heavy heart, it is a good bet that Ambassador Moses and his political friends, for all of their unctuous protestations to the contrary, welcome these same developments and feel vindicated by them—just as isolationists and pacifists and appeasers did in the disastrous first phases of World War II and at critical junctures of the cold war.

Who, Ambassador Moses writes, "can be against democracy?" Well, since he asks me, I will answer him: he himself is, at least where the Middle East is concerned, and so are most (all?) opponents of the Bush Doctrine, including those on the Right. For (if I may borrow one of his own phrases) "there is no other explanation" for their attacks on it than that, all things considered, and now that (as most of them desperately hope and fondly imagine) the count appears to be in, they think we would be better off with the Taliban and Saddam Hussein still in power. Or, with these two leading faces of Islamofascism gone from the scene, the alternative favored by Bush's opponents—though they rarely have the political courage or the intellectual honesty to come right out and say so—is a friendly dictator like Hosni Mubarak ("a sonofabitch," as FDR once said of Nicaragua's Anastasia Somoza, "but our sonofabitch").

In other words, we should return to our pre-9/11 policy of supporting similar strongmen. Yet resurrecting this policy would also restore the swamps of Islamofascism to the undisturbed condition they were in before 9/11, when we discovered to our horror that they had been breeding a mortal threat to us and to everything for which we stand. Moreover, it would choke off the voices throughout the Middle East that are now calling for political and religious reform, consigning them once again to the dead silence in which they existed before George W. Bush spoke the words and took the actions he did in response to 9/11. According to the rich trove of testimony that can most conveniently be found on the MEMRI website (www.memri.org/reform.html), it is these very words and deeds, so brutally and offhandedly derided by Ambassador Moses and his political friends, that have emboldened the reformers and have put democratization, along with religious opposition to Islamist radicalism, on the agenda throughout the entire Middle East.

Given all this, I find it curious that Ambassador Moses finds it "curious" that I should "call for patience." After all, whether he admits it or not, the plain fact is that we are only in the third scene of the first act of a five-act drama, which is to say the very early stages of a long-range effort to replace the tyrannies and despotisms of the Middle East with democratic regimes. The seeds having been planted, it will now take, yes, patience, as well as perseverance, for them to be nourished into full flower. The same virtues will be required to protect these tender plants against the inevitable bouts of bad weather and the spread of malignant infestations by which they are at this very moment being attacked and to which, if we were to follow the cynical and/or defeatist counsels of Bush's opponents, they would soon fall prey. Thus would a bold and brave and noble American enterprise be doomed to ignominious failure. And thus too—by acting once more like the "weak horse" that Osama bin Laden thought he could attack with impunity—would we invite even more lethal terrorist assaults upon our country than we suffered on 9/11.

Which is why Michael

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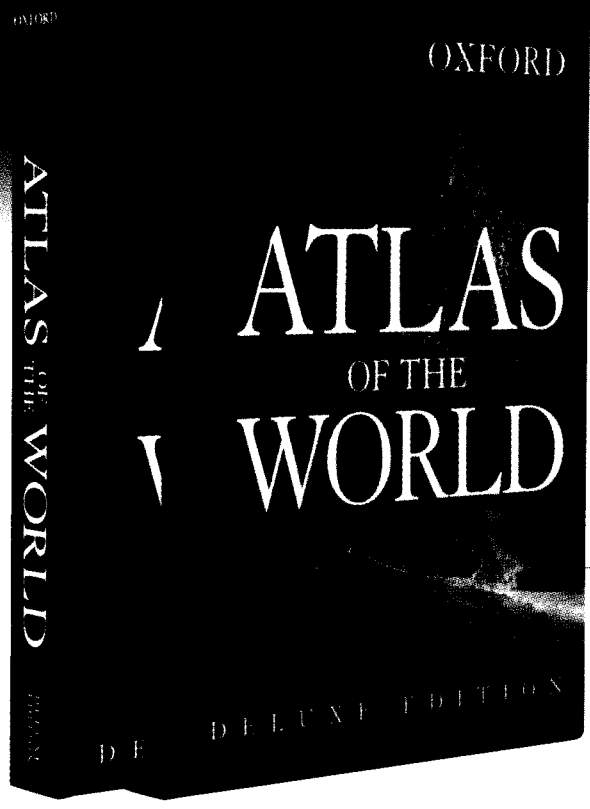

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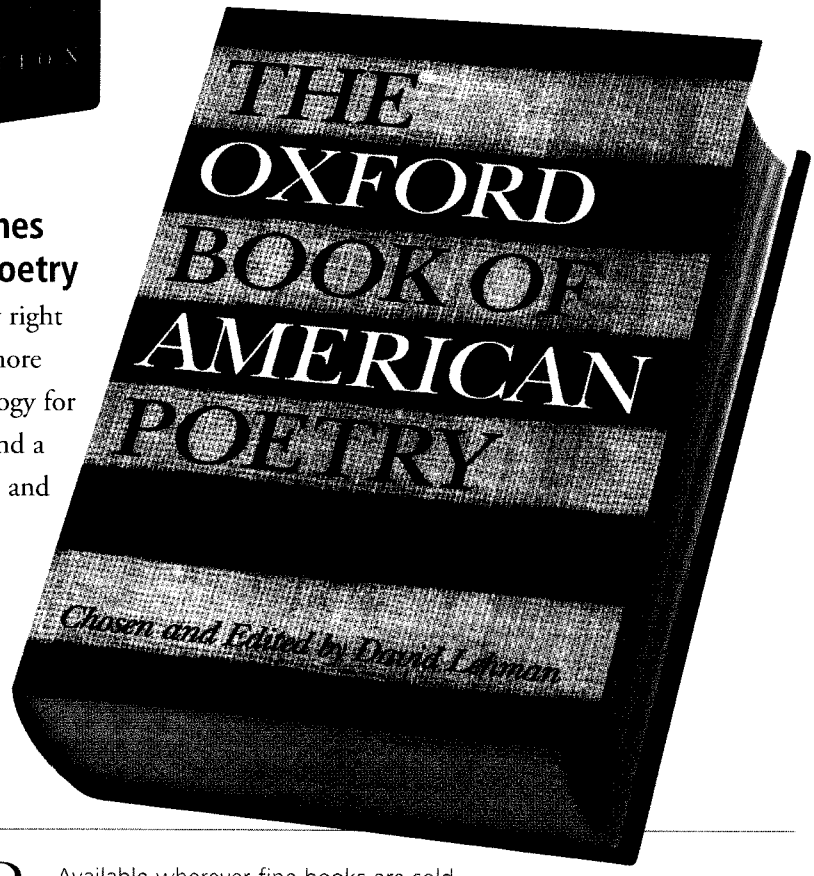

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Balch is exactly right to bring up Clausewitz and to stress the crucial role of national will. In this connection, though, I cannot for the life of me understand how Sheldon F. Gottlieb can conclude that the American public has "on its own" turned against the battle for Iraq in particular and against "the need to bring democracy to the region" in general. It is true that conservative radio and the Internet have broken the monopoly once enjoyed by the mainstream media, but unfortunately not yet to the extent of having been able to affect the tremendous imbalance in the ratio of negative to positive stories about Iraq documented definitively by Arthur Chrenkoff (and another striking example of which is provided here by J.M Batteau). How could public opinion not have been swayed by this torrent of determinedly bad news?

Speaking of Arthur Chrenkoff, I was touched to learn that he has been influenced by my writings, and I thank him for paying me so great a compliment. And speaking of compliments, I apologize for having mistakenly paid one to David Rieff.

Old Age

TO THE EDITOR:

Eric Cohen and Leon R. Kass inveigh against two proposed solutions to the growing societal problem of debility in old age; we might call them the technical fix and the autonomy fix ["Cast Me Not Off in Old Age," January]. With the technical fix, medicine promises cures for common scourges of old age like dementia, heart disease, and cancer. With the autonomy fix, patients use living wills to specify in advance what treatments they do not want administered to them in the future, thus hoping to avoid the indignities of old age.

I agree that we should not delude ourselves into thinking that medical science (and, I would add, exercise and diet) will guarantee us a good old age. And I agree that an individualistic worldview that encourages people to act in isolation to try to control their destiny is a flawed and impoverished one as applied to the elderly. My main disagreement with the authors is over the *implications* of their profound observations.

Messrs. Cohen and Kass put the responsibility for caregiving largely on the shoulders of families. But while most care for elders is and will continue to be provided by families, and while viewing the elderly as part of families is an advance over seeing them as isolated entities, focusing on families is too narrow. As I argue in my recent book, *The Denial of Aging: Perpetual Youth, Eternal Life, and Other Dangerous Fantasies*, it is not sufficient to emphasize (as Messrs. Cohen and Kass do) "giv[ing] care and comfort to those we cannot cure"; rather, we should strive to enable the elderly to engage with society to the extent possible within their limitations. This requires a broad *societal* response, something that the authors only mention as an afterthought.

This would require us truly to modernize Medicare so that chronic diseases, which make up most of what ail the elderly, can be attended to with the same degree of sophistication as are acute illnesses—not in the vain hope that chronic disease will be cured but in order to maximize the *functioning* (vision, hearing, mobility, etc.) of the elderly.

A broad approach for the physically frail might include linking them through the Internet to others who might benefit from their experience and counsel while offering aid in return. For the cognitively frail who cannot live independently, we need to develop assisted-living facilities and nursing homes that do more than just guard the health and safety of their residents. Allowing individuals with severe cognitive impairment to lead meaningful lives requires nurturing whatever residual spark of their fuller selves they retain.

Messrs. Cohen and Kass argue that the *current* best interests of patients with dementia should be given priority when it comes to decisions about their treatment. I generally agree with this position, although I think that there should be some acknowledgment of previously stated wishes. (The argument that living wills cannot protect against geriatric debility is a bit of a straw man, since their intent is typically to avoid burdensome interventions near the end of life, not to promote withholding all treatment at the first sign of frailty.) But Messrs. Cohen and Kass fail to recognize that determining a patient's current best interests requires that we establish objective standards.

We need not resign ourselves to leaving families "not wishing to condemn the worth of people's lives, yet not wanting to bind them to the rack of their growing misery . . . with no simple formulas for finding the best course of action." The medical profession could develop guidelines about what kind of treatment is too much and what is too little. By setting the upper and lower bounds for reasonable treatment—leaving ample room for the individualized weighing of benefits and burdens and the exercise of choice within the extremes—we can spare families the "most poignant dilemmas" that Messrs. Cohen and Kass seem to feel they must inevitably face.

MURIEL R. GILLICK, M.D.
Harvard Medical School
Boston, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITORS:

Eric Cohen and Leon R. Kass's analysis of issues related to care for the elderly is very timely. They are to be commended for taking a large view of a contemporary problem and addressing it in the context of history and tradition. But I fear that they may be guilty of a failure to hear what patients and families are really saying when they discuss things like living wills, health proxies, and a "right to die."

Messrs. Cohen and Kass worry that these instruments are not widespread enough to be clinically feasible, and that they undermine the individual medical guidance and emotional support that are required to care thoughtfully for aged parents and relatives. But the increasing prevalence of patients' dying in the hospital rather than at home means that families are forced to learn the jargon of the medical institution and use it in place of the famil-

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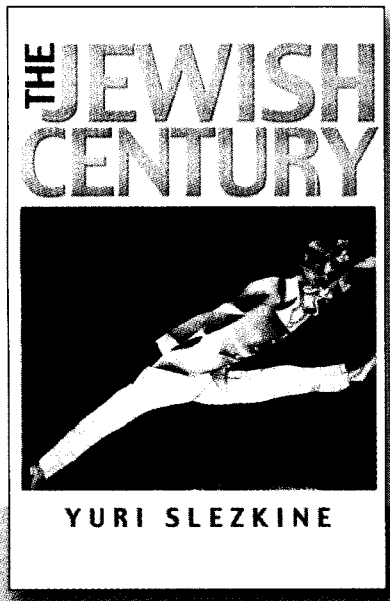

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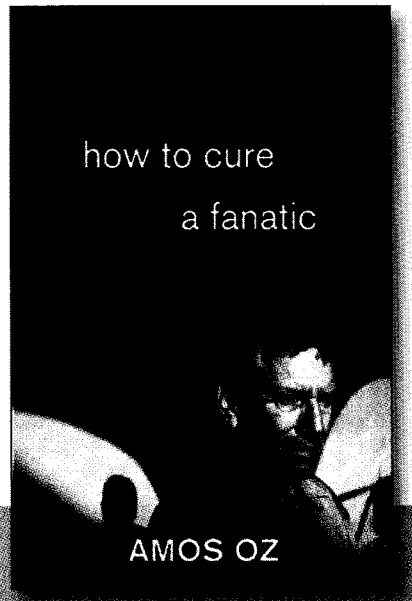

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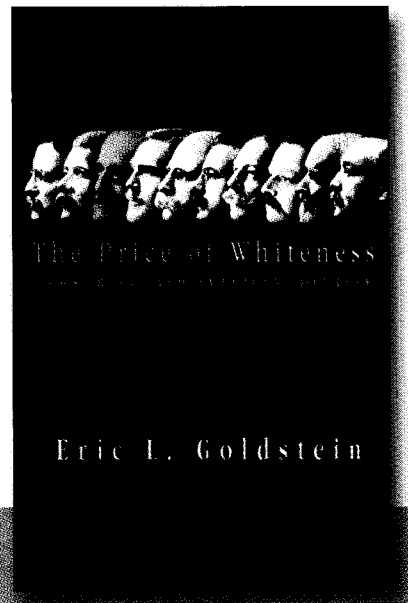

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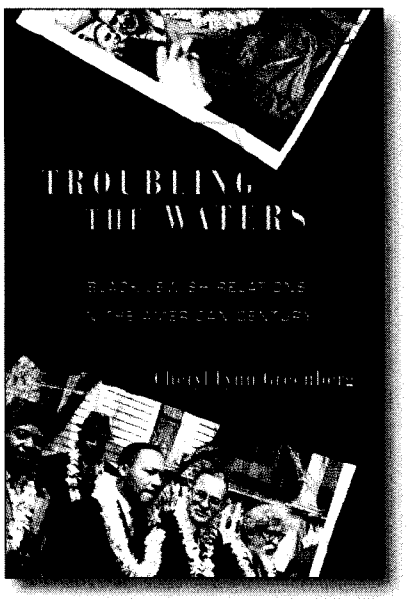

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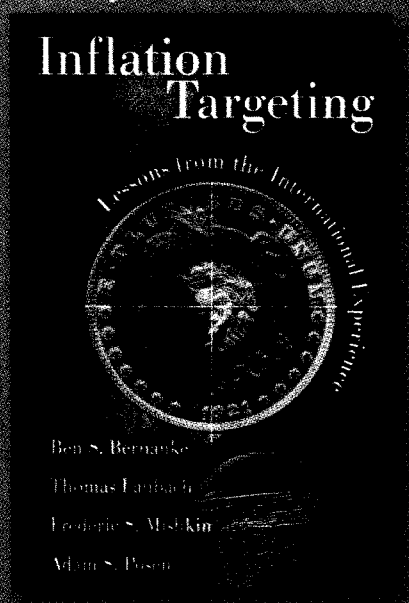

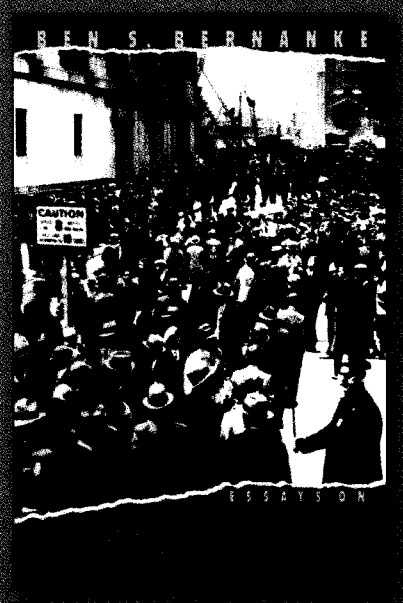

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iar, plain language of home and family. Most people who use living wills are not articulating an attack on tradition or the nature of man.

Caregivers are well served by trying to determine the real-life issues involved in requests for a living will or health proxy. People's needs can thus be identified, translated into communicable terms, and managed in real time as necessary. Engaging people on their own terms in this way may actually facilitate the responsible confrontation with the inevitable facts of aging that Messrs. Cohen and Kass advocate.

I am a pediatric nephrologist, and do not have a great deal of experience with debilitated patients. But I have witnessed the frustrations that come out of families' encounters with the legal and administrative machinery of the modern hospital. Often their only recourse is in living wills, proxies, and a patient's bill of rights, imperfect as they are. As we work to find better ways to cope with the care of the elderly and infirm, these instruments can serve a noble purpose.

HOWARD TRACHTMAN, M.D.
New Hyde Park, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

Eric Cohen and Leon R. Kass lucidly confront the difficult issues that our society is likely to face as the parents of my generation of recent college graduates age. By placing the issue of caregiving in the broader context of the degeneration of familial responsibilities, they illuminate the inherent instability of broken families and the false promises of the welfare state.

It is imperative that we confront these issues within a sound moral and philosophical framework before we are confronted with the harsh practical consequences. I applaud COMMENTARY for publishing a vital essay that stands against the bioethical demagoguery that has come to define our age.

ISAAC GRUBER
Fairfield, Connecticut

ERIC COHEN and LEON R. KASS write:

We thank our respondents for their thoughtful letters, which we take, for the most part, as friendly amendments to our argument.

We agree with Muriel R. Gillick that the primary goal of medicine for the elderly is maximizing *function* in the face of worsening debilities, not seeking to conquer debility itself. In our war against various diseases, we sometimes forget the importance of small improvements, including those that depend more on attentive care than on medical miracles. Dr. Gillick's eloquent formulation—"nurturing whatever residual spark of their fuller selves [the elderly] retain"—nicely describes the kind of care we ought to provide.

We also agree that society has a central role to play in providing such care—both society writ large in social programs like Medicare and Medicaid and society writ small in the form of local communities, families, and the institutional settings in which many elderly persons spend their last days. And we agree that modernizing Medicare requires placing greater emphasis on the management of *chronic* disease, including better in-house nursing care and greater attention to treatments aiming to prevent multiple acute episodes.

But stating a goal and knowing how to get there from here are two different matters. Already, we face a future in which entitlements for the elderly will use up an ever-increasing amount of our resources, even as the wealth-producing, tax-paying, and caregiving populations decline in proportion to the dependent elders they must support. Our challenge is figuring out how to improve care while restraining, as much as possible, its costs.

Here we face an ambivalence in our own argument. Seeking the best care possible is a moral imperative, lest we define the debilitated elderly as mere burdens, unworthy of the resources we expend to make their remaining days as comfortable and meaningful as possible. Yet providing the best care imaginable would erode our capacity to meet other civic obligations. To emphasize the devotion of family caregivers, as we do, is not an effort to downplay the role of society in providing crucial resources and support to patients and families. It is simply to recognize that society must limit the kind of care it can provide, precisely because the demand for better care is insatiable.

This leads us to the question of developing "objective standards" of care. Dr. Gillick seems to misread or misunderstand our article when she claims that we "fail to recognize that determining a patient's current best interests requires that we establish objective standards" for interventions near the end of life. To the contrary, we put forward several crucial objective standards: the moral obligation never to take active measures to end someone's life; to avoid excessively burdensome treatments, even when they might extend someone's life; to benefit always the life the patient still has rather than seeing life itself as a burden to be eliminated. But such standards need to be applied in particular cases, demanding loving prudence from doctors and family on the scene. This includes giving proper attention to the prior wishes of the patient, but without seeing the wishes of a past self as the only guide for caring well for the present one.

Perhaps the most difficult challenge will be defining standards of care in the policy arena, including what kinds of intervention Medicare will and will not cover. Dr. Gillick thinks it will be easy for "the medical profession to develop guidelines about what . . . is too much and what is too little." We are not so sanguine. Are there really *morally* objective criteria for determining what degree of dementia disqualifies my mother from which sorts of medical intervention? Should our society accept across-the-board age-based or capacity-based grounds for denying care to the elderly?

Even if we could define such "objective" standards of care—and did our best to be guided by them—we will never be able to spare families "the most poignant dilemmas," as Dr. Gillick seems to hope. No policy, no guideline, no protocol can liberate us from the anguish of letting a loved one die or seeing a loved one suffer under our watch. Only a heartless society can make its end-of-life dilemmas go away.

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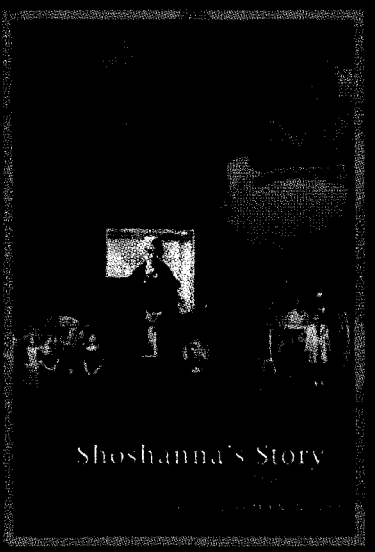

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Howard Trachtman accuses us of not listening to patients in offering our critique of living wills, health proxies, and a "right to die." But he seems to be hunting for more disagreement than may exist. For one thing, we explicitly endorse the wisdom of health proxies, understood as a way to empower those who will eventually or inevitably speak on one's behalf. And we do not claim that most people who use living wills are "articulating an attack on tradition or the nature of man." We simply argue, based on the best social-science data, that living wills are ineffective at meeting their own goals; that prior wishes are not the only or best guide to making future caregiving decisions; and that those who promote living wills, as opposed to those who use them, often do have a distorted understanding of human nature by emphasizing self-determination at the expense of human finitude and interdependence.

If living wills promote a deeper understanding of what it means to age well and care well, then we are all for them. If they help preserve even a dose of loving humanity in the face of the "machinery of the modern hospital," then we endorse them. But the evidence suggests that living wills have largely failed to meet these noble ends, and that no legal instrument can liberate us from the human dilemmas of learning how to put ourselves in the hands of caregivers, and how to care for those who put their trust in us.

Who Is a Jew?

TO THE EDITOR:

I appreciate Meir Soloveichik's sensitive discussion of my memoir, *Girl Meets God*, but I am slightly puzzled by his professed puzzlement about whether I—as a convert to Judaism who was subsequently baptized—remain halakhically Jewish ["How Not to Become a Jew," January]. So unambiguous is my halakhic status that I can only conclude that Rabbi Soloveichik's perplexity is a mere literary conceit; I myself have never for a moment doubted that, according to Jewish law, I am both Jewish and an apostate.

If I concur with Rabbi Soloveichik about my halakhic status, I take issue with his claim that I "regard rabbinic Judaism as a stepping stone to the higher truth of Christianity." I am not sure what this means exactly, but insofar as it implies a certain supersessionism—that Judaism is the static backdrop to Christianity—I would dissent from it.

To be sure, life in an Orthodox Jewish community shaped by the rhythms of rabbinic Judaism is part of my spiritual autobiography, and my own understanding of Jesus and the New Testament has been unavoidably shaped by my study of Torah in the years prior to my baptism. But I certainly do not view rabbinic Judaism as a "stepping stone" to anything other than (perhaps) a faithful halakhic life. Indeed, insofar as rabbinic Judaism developed over the same centuries as did the early Church, it would be logically incoherent to regard the former as a stepping stone. Rabbinic Judaism is one response by some of God's children to life in a covenantal relationship with Him.

I also wish to comment on Rabbi Soloveichik's discussion of the meaning of private baptism. The community of the Trinity ensures that nothing in Christianity is truly private—even the hermit alone in the desert participates in the community of Triune life. While baptisms can be performed without witnesses, most churches today frown on the practice. Instead, by having baptisms performed in the presence of the local church body, they seek to underscore the communal nature of the baptismal covenant.

This is something I touch on in a chapter of *Girl Meets God* that reflects upon the symbolism of infant baptism: a baby cannot possibly hope to live out the promises being made on his behalf in the baptismal ceremony, and so infant baptisms are, for many adults who witness them, a profound reminder that Christianity is communal; that it is next to impossible for any of us to live a life of faithful Christian discipleship without the support, blessing, and admonishment of our brothers and sisters in Christ; that, as William Willimon once wrote, faith commitments "that are not reinforced and reformed by the community tend to be short-lived."

Rabbi Soloveichik is right to point out the different understandings of nationhood that inhere in Christianity and Judaism. Unlike the Jewish *gerut* ritual, baptism does not mark one's joining a nation. But it does graft the newly baptized person into a people—the people of God.

The moral of Rabbi Soloveichik's article seems to be that Jewish communities should be careful about whom they convert. That he feels such a warning is necessary demonstrates another difference between Judaism and Christianity.

LAUREN F. WINNER
Durham, North Carolina

TO THE EDITOR:

Meir Soloveichik compares the conversion rituals of Judaism and Christianity in order to illustrate points of difference between the two faiths. As he sees it, "conversion to Judaism is as much a public, legal proceeding as a sacramental one." It is "at once spiritual and civil—or, indeed, political"; it involves "not only taking on a new faith but also a new nationality." Baptism to Christianity, by contrast, is a "private," sacramental matter, in which "nationality is irrelevant."

A pitfall of writing about Christianity in such general terms is that different types of Christians approach baptism in radically different ways. Generally speaking, evangelicals have no real belief in the efficacy of baptism or any other sacrament, while Catholics believe that the sacraments are avenues by which God's grace is communicated to mankind. In between these poles are a dizzying variety of views.

Contrary to Rabbi Soloveichik's sketch, baptism in the Catholic Church—the tradition I know best—is never a private matter between a convert and his priest. The situation he cites in which a non-baptized person can perform the sacrament is limited to cases of conver-

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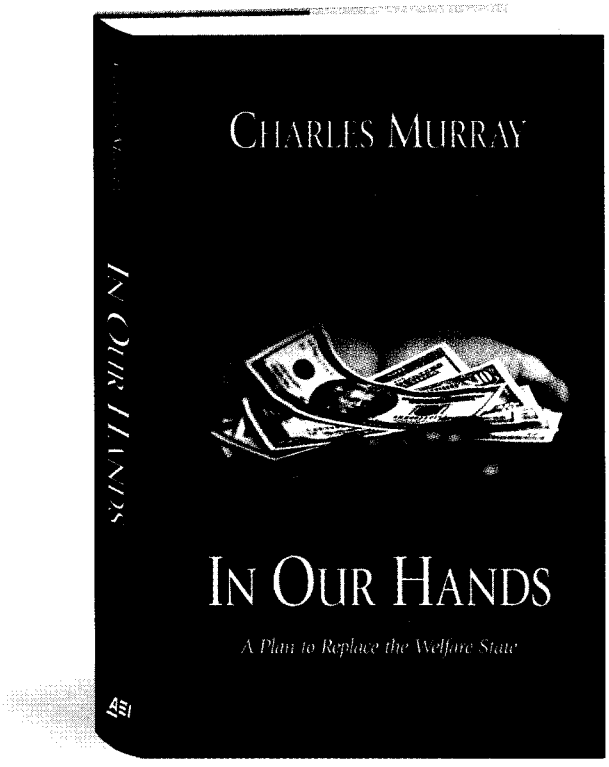

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sion or (most commonly) of an infant on its deathbed. This is an exception born of grave necessity, and is not the normative option. Under circumstances in which death is not imminent, the entire process from evangelization to sacrament is the work of the community, both clergy and laity. While such private matters as regeneration and forgiveness of sin are held to be key effects of baptism, the far greater stress, especially in the baptism of infants, is on the individual's incorporation into the community of believers.

Can one lose membership in this community, as Rabbi Soloveichik claims, contrasting it with immutable Jewishness? On a functional level I suppose so, but beyond that I am not so sure. The early Church struggled over what to do with those who had denounced the faith in order to avoid martyrdom at the hands of the Romans but who later repented. It was decided to allow them to be readmitted to communion without the need for a second baptism. This would suggest that although a person might denounce his or her Catholicism, the indelible mark left by the sacraments of initiation endures.

REVEREND THOMAS M. PROVENZANO
Chicago, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR:

In his wonderful article, Meir Soloveichik misses two small points about Christian conversion. One runs somewhat counter to his thesis, while the other supports it.

He asserts that a baptized Christian who does not believe in Christian dogma is no longer a Christian. But, at least for the Catholic Church, this is not the case. As the new catechism states, "Baptism seals the Christian with the indelible spiritual mark of his belonging to Christ. No sin can erase this mark, even if sin prevents baptism from bearing the fruits of salvation." Ideally, the attitude of the Church toward the apostate Christian is very similar to the attitude of the halakha toward the apostate Jew that Rabbi Soloveichik describes. For Catholics, baptism is the circumcision of the soul, binding the Christian to God and Christ "once for all."

Second, to emphasize the private, spiritual nature of baptism, Rabbi Soloveichik notes that in the absence of a priest, even a non-baptized person can perform a baptism. In fact, even a baptizer need not be present. The catechism states that one can be "baptized by blood" by dying for the sake of the faith, and "baptized by desire" by wishing to be baptized when prevented from doing so. In this light, baptism may be seen even more to concern the relationship between the individual, God, and the world to come.

CRAIG BRUNEY
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

Meir Soloveichik is certainly correct to maintain that, despite the fact that Lauren Winner came to Judaism by way of conversion, her status as an apostate Jew is no different from that of any born Jew who has forsaken Judaism. But contrary to what he suggests, it is not so clear that a "betrayal" like apostasy does not affect one's status as a member of the Jewish people.

A few decades ago, the Israeli Supreme Court rejected the claim of the monk Brother Daniel, a born Jew who had committed apostasy to Christianity and then demanded that the state of Israel continue to recognize him as a Jew. Writing about the case, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein (a different article of whose is cited approvingly by Rabbi Soloveichik) demonstrated that rabbinic law, no less than Israeli civil law, "recognize[s] the fatal fallacy of the notion that, *ad aeternitatem*, the crown of Jewry can never fall off, no matter how ill it is worn."

Regardless of whether Winner herself has crossed over the line marking the boundaries of Jewish identity, we should be aware of Rabbi Lichtenstein's conclusion: "the halakhic principle [is] that an apostate can become a Gentile, and that Jewishness is not an absolutely irrevocable status."

JOEL B. WOLOWELSKY
Yeshivah of Flatbush
Brooklyn, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

Meir Soloveichik asserts that as a convert to Judaism, Lauren Winner remains a Jew despite her later conversion to Christianity. At the same time, he writes that "women serve as the foundation of the Jewish family by instinct," and that "one whose mother is Jewish is considered a member of the Jewish family by birth." This raises a troubling question: will Winner's daughters and their own daughters, raised entirely as Christians, still be considered Jewish?

Two concepts of Jewish identity may be relevant here. The concept of Judaism as a family, which Rabbi Soloveichik and others before him have espoused, may be traced back to Abraham's covenant with God, which was to be transmitted through his seed (*zera*)—that is, through Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants. *Zera* denotes a family bond, a tradition passed down from generation to generation that combines the physical and the concrete with the divine. Accordingly, as Rabbi Soloveichik notes, a convert somehow leaps the physical barrier and becomes a son or daughter of Abraham.

But *zera* alone is not enough. The Jewish family is different from other groups with mere hereditary ties. No one would say that every group of descendants from a single common ancestor forms a family or a people in any meaningful sense. They have not sustained the memory of their shared past, nor do they have any kind of shared customs or sense of purpose. Only "seed" together with a compelling imaginative tradition (*zera u'berit*) makes Judaism a family—and something more than a family.

Whether Lauren Winner is a Jew or not, her descendants—including the matrilineal ones—will be lost from Judaism as the passage of time washes away the memory of their once famously Jewish grandmother.

KEVIN JON WILLIAMS
Wynnewood, Pennsylvania

MEIR SOLOVEICHIK writes:

If Lauren Winner is puzzled by my essay, I am doubly puzzled by her response. From it, one would conclude that she does not believe Christianity offers its adherents a "higher truth" than that proclaimed by the Judaism that she has left behind. Yet in her book she

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JERUSALEM VIEWPOINTS

Al-Qaeda, Zarqawi, and Israel: Is There a New Jihadi Threat Destabilizing the Eastern Front?

DORE GOLD AND LT. COL. (RES.) JONATHAN D. HALEVI

Groups identifying with al-Qaeda—or the global jihad—are determined to acquire operational footholds close to Israel's borders, as al-Qaeda operations around Israel are becoming more prominent. Were Israel to withdraw from the strategic barrier it controls in the Jordan Valley, Israeli vulnerability could attract global jihadi elements, who would seek to use Jordan as a platform to reach the West Bank and then Israel.

Ahmadinejad Calls for Israel's Elimination and Declares War on the West: A Case Study of Incitement to Genocide

MANFRED GERSTENFELD

Iranian President Ahmadinejad directly threatened the West: "We are in the process of an historical war between the World of Arrogance [i.e., the West] and the Islamic world." "A world without America and Zionism" is "attainable." Iran's threat of Israel's extinction serves as a warning of Iran's intentions toward the international community.

JERUSALEM ISSUE BRIEFS

The Palestinian Authority and the Challenge of Palestinian Elections

MAJ.-GEN. (RES.) GIORA EILAND

A two-state solution means that on one side there will be a Palestinian state, but on the other side there will be a Jewish state. I have never heard any real Arab leader say loud and clear that Israel has the right to exist as a Jewish state. Prime Minister Sharon did not intend a further unilateral withdrawal in the West Bank.

Sharon's Strategic Legacy for Israel: Competing Perspectives

DAN DIKER

Sharon saw disengagement as a mechanism for trading land with a dense Palestinian population, like the Gaza Strip, in exchange for land that was critical for Israel's future security. After the disengagement he repeated the traditional "defensible borders" position and reiterated that Israel would retain close to half of the West Bank.

DAILY ALERT

www.dailyalert.org
A daily digest of hyperlinked news and commentary on Israel and the Mideast from the world and Hebrew press, prepared for the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

NEWEST BOOKS

Defensible Borders for a Lasting Peace

DR. YUVAL STEINITZ, MAJ.-GEN. (RES.) YAAKOV AMIDROR, DR. MEIR ROSENNE, AND DR. DORE GOLD

When Israel disengaged from the Gaza Strip, it did not seek a quid-pro-quo from the Palestinians but rather from the U.S., in the form of a presidential letter. Israel's rights and requirements for defensible borders, as proposed by President George W. Bush, have now been placed squarely on the global diplomatic agenda. This multi-disciplinary study focuses on Israel's minimal territorial requirements to enable it to defend itself in the post-Iraq War Middle East.

Israel and Europe: An Expanding Abyss?

MANFRED GERSTENFELD

In a reconnaissance mission into the essence of European-Israeli political relations, the author illustrates how Israel and often European Jewry have been made to pay for Europe's major strategic mistakes in defense, energy, and immigration policies. With comments by Jeffrey Gedmin, Andrei Markovits, Robert Wistrich, and others.

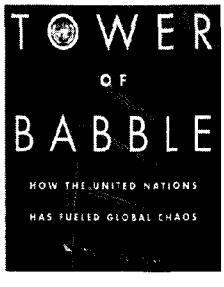
Human Rights of Christians in Palestinian Society

JUSTUS WEINER

Tens of thousands of Christians residing in areas "governed" by the Palestinian Authority have abandoned their holy sites and ancestral properties to live abroad, while those that remain do so as a beleaguered and dwindling minority.

Tower of Babble: How the United Nations Has Fueled Global Chaos

DORE GOLD (NEW, UPDATED EDITION)



The UN was originally created in 1945 to halt aggression and safeguard human rights. But it has utterly failed at its mission, particularly in the 1990s when it repeatedly failed to stop acts of genocide, and expedited global chaos. Newly-expanded paperback just released with previously undisclosed "oil-for-food" details.

NGO MONITOR

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makes clear that believing in Jesus is irreconcilable with living a halakhic life. The Jewish holiday of Sukkot, she tells her readers, "is one of the things I gave up because of Jesus. I gave up [the holiday of] Purim, which I love, and [observance of] kashrut, which I love. . . . All because I was courted by a very determined carpenter from Nazareth." Lauren Winner also speaks of her obligation, as an evangelical Christian, to bear witness to the truth of Christianity in public. On an Ash Wednesday at Columbia University, she found herself hoping that a young woman's willingness to "proclaim, at least one day a year, that she is a Christian, will lodge somewhere in some student's heart."

The fact is that to be an evangelical Christian is to hope that *everyone* will embrace the "carpenter from Nazareth"—which, in the case of Jews, means that they will give up practicing rabbinic Judaism. If Winner does not believe this, then she is not an evangelical Christian; and if she truly believes that Jews have no need of becoming Christian, then she should share this conviction not with the readers of COMMENTARY but with her many evangelical readers who regard her as an ideal type of the Jew who has seen the light.

Contrary to Winner's historical claim, rabbinic Judaism was already in existence when Christianity began; many of the rabbis whose opinions are recorded in the Mishnah were teaching Jewish law at the time of the Church's birth. Rabbi Gamaliel makes an appearance in the New Testament book of Acts; his forebear Hillel was one of the most influential rabbinic sages. Paul claims to have been raised a rabbinic Jew, but insists that what his fellow Pharisees missed was that the Law was no longer in effect, and that the Torah was nothing more than a stepping stone to the higher truth of the Gospel. "Before faith came," Paul writes to the Galatians, "we were imprisoned under the law." Halakha, he informs his readers, "was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith; but now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian."

No faithful Christian can see rabbinic Judaism as merely a path leading to what Winner calls a "faithful halakhic life." To be a religious Christian is to insist that there is something about Jewish dogma that is profoundly wrong, just as to be an Orthodox Jew is to respond that it is the Christians who are in error. On this, Jews and Christians agree: one of them has embraced a religion that proclaims a "higher truth" than the other.

Lauren Winner has given every indication elsewhere that she knows this to be the case. Thus, in a book review in the *New York Times*, she has chastised the religion writer Winifred Gallagher for an "uncritical embrace of ecumenism" and for believing that "the world's religions are different paths to the same truth." Gallagher, she writes, fails to make room for "the unfashionable belief, shared by the orthodox of most of the world's faiths, that there is something exclusive about the nature of religious truth claims," and she suggests that, in her next book, Gallagher "invite pilgrims on a journey that doesn't require them to surrender particularistic claims in favor of a spiritual smorgasbord."

Surrendering her own particularistic claims is exactly what Lauren Winner does in the first part of her letter. Then, however, comes her conclusion, where she states that, while Judaism is wary of accepting converts, Christianity is not—a fact that may demonstrate "another difference between Judaism and Christianity." Here the clear implication seems to be that the universality of the Church's mission is a distinct virtue, and one that is sadly lacking in Judaism.

It is true that Jews have never focused on converting the world; but then, in stark contrast to Christianity, neither have they ever insisted that joining their faith is necessary for salvation. At a time when Augustine was declaring that most of the world's people, including unbaptized infants, were destined for eternal damnation, the rabbis were ruling that "the righteous of the nations of the world have a portion in the world to come." Need one add that Christians' insistence on their responsibility to save the world led historically to unpleasant consequences known all too well to most Jews, including, one would assume, some of Lauren Winner's father's ancestors, or that the Christian penchant for mission has in the past forced considerable numbers of Jews to choose between conversion and death?

A number of my Christian correspondents point out that baptism can be communal in nature, and that the church embodies a community. But I explicitly acknowledged this, though I also noted that the Church sees itself as a spiritual fellowship, not a political one, whereas the Jewish people sees itself also as a national entity. The difference is evident in the fact that baptism in private *is* considered valid while conversion to Judaism without a "citizenship court" of three is *never* valid.

As for whether baptism is "indelible" or, on the contrary, irrelevant to one's status as a Christian, a joint statement by the group "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," signed by many of America's most prominent Catholic and evangelical theologians, says the following:

> The *communio sanctorum* ["community of the saints"] embraces all Christians, including those whose lives are not notably marked by holiness. In the New Testament, the term "saints" generally refers to *all who are baptized and confess Christ as Lord*. [emphasis added]

Catholics may believe baptism is an indelible mark, and some evangelicals may not see baptism in the same way; but one who does not believe in Jesus is not a Christian, and baptism, for a very wide swath of the Christian world, plays a special role in defining one as a Christian.

In his letter, Joel B. Wolowelsky cites an article about the Brother Daniel case by Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein. But his brief quotations from a lengthy and complex essay are misleading. Rabbi Lichtenstein's thesis is built on a discussion in the Talmud of the ten lost tribes of Israel, who were exiled by the king of Assyria before the destruction of the northern king-

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dom in the 8th century B.C.E. So assimilated did those tribes become, the rabbis postulated, that a marriage between a descendant of one of them and a Jew could not be considered valid. So, too, Rabbi Lichtenstein suggests, a born Jew who experiences "total alienation from the Jewish people" can lose his "Jewish sanctity." As such, his marriage to a Jewess would be invalid.

At the same time, however, Rabbi Lichtenstein notes that such an individual should not be regarded in the same light as a non-Jew. By way of analogy, he cites the halakhic abrogation, during the time of the Babylonian exile, of the agricultural tithing laws that applied to Jews in the Holy Land. "What," he asks, "was the status of the land during the Babylonian exile? Was it simply identical with Iceland's or Manchuria's?" His answer: "we recoil from these possibilities instinctively, and our instincts are right." So, too, with an apostate. On the one hand, having abandoned any sense of allegiance to the Jewish people, he is "a Jew without Jewishness," and lacks the "sacredness of the Jewish personality." On the other hand, if "we ask, in purely descriptive terms, whether anyone born of Jewish parents is a Jew, the answer must be yes." Moreover, should such apostates "return to the fold, they would represent reformed prodigal children, rather than fresh converts."

One may interpret the rabbinic injunction suspending marriage with members of the ten lost tribes as Rabbi Lichtenstein does, or one may follow other commentators who confine themselves to the talmudic point at hand, suggesting no further implications. But it is agreed that, in some sense, anyone born a Jew is a Jew—and that no matter how far a Jew has strayed from his people, Judaism always welcomes his return, just as it has dreamed of the return of the ten lost tribes of Israel from the four corners of the earth. Such is the strength of the blood bonds invoked by the theologian Franz Rosenzweig, whom I quoted in my article.

This brings us to the question of Lauren Winner's descendants. Kevin Jon Williams writes that they will be "lost from Judaism with the passage of time." He may be right; the statistics these days are on his side. But I, for one, cannot rule out their return. As I noted in my essay, the writer Stephen Dubner found his way back to Judaism after being raised by two Catholic-Jewish parents with no sense of his Jewishness. A child of Abraham remains a child of Abraham, and, no matter how lost, might just find his way back to the covenant of Abraham. However high the odds against this happening, surely they are no higher than the odds against the children of one man from Mesopotamia surviving, as a family and as a nation, the ravages of the centuries, and transforming the world in the process.

Among the YPSL's

TO THE EDITOR:

Having been a member of Social Democrats USA in the late 1980's, and having also counted Penn Kemble as a friend, I was moved by Joshua Muravchik's memorial to him ["Comrades," January]. But I would point out a small error, and two larger matters on which I think he misstates important points.

Mr. Muravchik refers to Penn's "own Marxist mentor, Alex Garber," as having "grown up as a member of the Olerites, an eponymous Communist splinter group whose ranks at its height may barely have reached double digits." A couple of sentences later he refers to Garber as a "Communist schismatic." The group was actually called the "Oehlerites," after their leader Hugo Oehler, and they were not schismatics from official Communism but one of many split-offs from the Trotskyist movement.

The positions of the Oehlerites were extremely puristic, to the point that they attacked other Trotskyists for having sold out to the bourgeoisie—and this in the 1930's! The group's only surviving document of consequence is Hugo Oehler's pamphlet *Barricades in Barcelona*, which covers the same events described in George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* but in a much more exaggerated and sectarian style. If the group had any virtue at all, it was that its members positively loathed Stalinism.

More significantly, Mr. Muravchik suggests that Max Shachtman, the former Trotsky associate, had ceased being a "Trotskyite" many years before he recruited some of Mr. Muravchik's "comrades" to his brand of socialism in the late 1950's. This is arguable. It is true that Shachtman broke with Trotsky in 1940, and had given up his revolutionary political stand by 1962. But Shachtman supported the Trotskyist concept of a "Fourth International" for a decade after his rupture with the founder. It is also true—and something of an irony, considering how many of Mr. Muravchik's comrades have supported U.S. military intervention overseas in recent years—that Shachtman's group strongly opposed American involvement in World War II. Shachtman's Independent Socialist League (ISL) was included in the U.S. Attorney General's list of subversive organizations until the late 1950's.

Shachtman still met politically with an "official" Trotskyist, Murry Weiss of the Socialist Workers' party, in 1957. Although Shachtman's group produced the array of social democrats described and memorialized by Mr. Muravchik, its younger veterans also included some of the most extreme radicals of the 1960's and after. Examples include Shane Mage, leader of the tiny Workers' League, and Jim Robertson, founder of the even tinier Spartacist League, which took a sharp turn toward Stalinism.

In sum, the issue of when Shachtman ceased to be a Trotskyist, and what the very term "Trotskyism" means in a broad historical sense (as opposed to a sectarian or self-interested one), remains open and neglected. It is part of the peculiar legacy of the 1960's that the experience of non-Stalinist radicals in the U.S. and globally has almost never been significantly examined by American historians.

Mr. Muravchik con-

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tributes to this problem when he elides a great deal of the complicated if perhaps ultimately irrelevant history of the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL), of which he was national chairman from 1968 to 1973. He describes YPSL as "the youth section of the Socialist party of America that had been founded in the early 20th century by Eugene Debs and was led for many decades by Norman Thomas." This is a bit like the common descriptions of the Democratic party of Senators Edward Kennedy and Joseph Lieberman as the party of Jefferson and Jackson, with no acknowledgement of intervening controversies. Such condensation is a lesser matter when it involves major American institutions, about which many citizens understand the historical basics, than when it touches on small radical groups whose history is not well known.

STEPHEN SCHWARTZ
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

Reading Joshua Muravchik's "Comrades," I was reminded of the old slogan, "Don't trust anyone over thirty"—or, don't acknowledge that your own ideas may owe something to theirs. Mr. Muravchik in his article seems to have fallen prey to this latter piece of 60's hubris.

Outside of acknowledging Alex Garber's influence on Penn Kemble, Mr. Muravchik gives the impression that Kemble, Tom Kahn, and Paul Feldman sprang fully grown from the head of Zeus and invented the idea of social democracy in America. He acknowledges that the latter two had been "devotees of a former Trotskyist named Max Shachtman," but makes short shrift of Shachtman's central role in the formation of their ideas and his continued influence on them until his death.

He also dismisses the centrality of Shachtman's ideas to the Socialist party, the Social Democratic Federation, and the Social Democrats USA (often referred to as the "Right Shachtmanites" by their Old and New Left detractors). As for Mr. Muravchik's own Young People's Socialist League (YPSL), he writes that "although Shachtman was one of the elder statesmen who occasionally made stirring speeches to us, no YPSL of my generation was a Shachtmanite. What is more, our mentors, Paul and Tom, had come under Shachtman's sway years after he himself had ceased to be a Trotsykite."

In fact, Shachtman was much more than a maker of stirring speeches. Yes, the YPSL's were not Trotskyists, largely because, as Mr. Muravchik notes, Shachtman himself had long since ceased to be one. He broke with Trotsky and formed the Worker's party in 1940 over the issue of the nature of the Soviet Union—the central issue on the American Left and the one upon which the splits and factional schisms among socialist groups were largely based.

Shachtman's insistence that the Soviet Union was not socialist but "bureaucratic collectivist"—having a new ruling class with a totalitarian and imperialist nature—contributed greatly to the principled anti-Communism of the various groups of which he and his followers were a part, a stance to which the YPSL's became heir. The group around Shachtman came to believe that the Stalinist nations were far worse than Western capitalism, that democratic socialists should side with the U.S. in international conflicts against the Soviet Union or its proxies, and that they should be (to use Herman Kahn's phrase) "aggressive democrats," seeking not only to counter totalitarianism but actively to spread democracy.

This included an obligation to counter tyranny early on, and not repeat the mistakes that individuals and governments of their generation had made by appeasing Nazism before World War II and Communism during the cold war. Hence their support of the Vietnam war, in which they were joined by their allies within organized labor, principally the leadership of the AFL-CIO.

By the early 60's, Shachtman's group had also made a major practical shift, by abandoning its third-party election runs in favor of working within the Democratic party to influence its policies. One of the fruits of this shift was Shachtman's encouraging of Kahn, Kemble, Carl Gershman, and others to engage in politics and the civil-rights movement, which, as Mr. Muravchik details, they did effectively. I would take nothing away from these individuals in their brilliant application of the principles they inherited, but it did not occur in a vacuum.

ELLEN HEYMAN
Georgetown University
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

I very much appreciated Joshua Muravchik's tribute to the late Penn Kemble, especially his evocation of the neat and elegant young socialist among the company of his rather more conventionally radical comrades (almost all of whom by now, of course, are neither radical, nor young, nor—despite what one or two of them might continue to claim—even faintly socialist). Since for a brief part of this story I, too, was among Mr. Muravchik's comrades, I hope I may be forgiven for offering a correction to one part of his account. I think it is of some interest in itself, and throws an interesting light on the relation of Penn and his YPSL-Social Democratic comrades to the real world of American politics.

Contrary to Mr. Muravchik's account, Penn was not the one who dreamed up the organization called the Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM). The credit for this, if in the end credit it be, belongs to Ben Wattenberg. In 1972, before the presidential election of that year, it was easy to see that George McGovern and his leftist supporters were headed for a major defeat. Thus, reasoned Ben, after the election would be an ideal time to bring together the two leading groups of centrist Democrats, the supporters of Hubert Humphrey and the supporters of Henry Jackson, and retake the party. Actually, it would not be unfair to say that CDM was first organized in my apartment, where Ben, my husband Norman Podhoretz, and I drew up a founding statement whose slogan was "Come Home, Democrats."

After making a bit of a splash with a full-page ad in the *New York Times*, we set-

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tled down to the work of figuring out exactly how we would function. Ben had asked Penn to be CDM's executive director, and, if memory serves, we spent our first several meetings on the question of how, or whether, to write our by-laws. Since most, or perhaps all—I no longer remember—of our financing came from the AFL-CIO, our first officially agreed-upon act in 1973 was to issue a statement expressing our disapproval of President Richard Nixon's budget. After this, we had some annual banquets at which we bestowed honors upon some of our more worthy members. At some point, the directorship of CDM passed to Mr. Muravchik.

By the time Jimmy Carter ascended to the presidency in 1976, it would in all honesty have to be said that CDM had utterly failed in its mission to become a counterweight to the Left in the Democratic party. In the meantime, however, we had become a kind of community, not very large but not entirely without a voice. And by 1980, most of us, though not all, marched ourselves cheerfully into the camp of Ronald Reagan.

After CDM, as before it, Penn had a variety of jobs and projects, all undertaken with his unswerving passion to increase the spread of democratic rights throughout the world. It seems fair to say, in deepest sadness, that we will never look upon his like again.

MIDGE DECTER
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

Joshua Muravchik's eulogy for Penn Kemble is a fitting tribute. Though I found it for the most part a wonderful stroll down memory lane with people I consider old friends and coalition partners, I was disappointed that he chose to lump me and my fellow "followers of [Reverend] Sun Myung Moon" together with other political "immoderates" like the Jewish Defense League and the disciples of Lyndon LaRouche.

Mr. Muravchik knows better. He and his YPSL colleagues kept real extremists like those at arm's length. But from the late 60's through the late 70's, the YPSL's made common cause with us in the Unification Church many times, and precisely because they understood that, despite our quirky religion, we were not political extremists. Causes that I participated in with YPSL ranged from supporting Henry Jackson for the Democratic presidential nomination to opposing the Stalinists on the war in Vietnam, blocking the leftist crowd from taking over the United States Youth Council, educating Americans about Soviet oppression of intellectual dissidents, supporting Israel, and working to elect moderate Democrats to the Washington, D.C. city council. Later, we Unificationists, just like the YPSL neoconservatives, tended to close ranks with the Republicans.

Those shoulder-by-shoulder battles with the YPSL's are precious memories for me, and it saddens me to see an old comrade forget so easily.

DAN FEFFERMAN
International Coalition for Religious Freedom
Falls Church, Virginia

TO THE EDITOR:

It has long been nearly impossible to keep track of all the peregrinations and permutations of the American political Left in the 20th century. As the glory days of the Lovestoneites, Shachtmanites, Trotskyites, and the rest fade further from view with the passing of time, it becomes harder still. Many thanks, then, to Joshua Muravchik for providing a clear and moving portrait of the core group at the center of one of the most important of those factions, the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL), and, in particular, of the late, great, admired, and much missed Penn Kemble.

Contrary to what Mr. Muravchik suggests, Penn did not quite abandon his New York City activities after relocating to Washington. I had the good fortune to work closely with him on a number of projects for Mayor Ed Koch, who in the 1980's seemed to be the last, lonely voice of anti-Communism within the Democratic party. By the middle of the decade, the battle between Left and Right was being waged over the spread of Soviet-backed, Castro-style juntas in Central America. Penn spearheaded an effort to provide moral and political support to the Nicaraguan *contras*, Costa Rican President Óscar Arias Sánchez, and other proponents of democracy in the region. Spurred on by Penn, Mayor Koch took on a considerable political risk by leading a large delegation to the region to back the "small d" democrats and raise their profile with the American public.

The dream held by Penn and others of restoring to the party of Harry Truman, Scoop Jackson, and Ed Koch the courage to fight totalitarians and support democracy movements is even more fleeting today—incredibly, after the end of the cold war—than it was 20 years ago. But abandoning that dream should in no way diminish respect for its chief advocate and avatar. May Penn Kemble rest in peace.

JONATHAN R. COHEN
Norwalk, Connecticut

JOSHUA MURAVCHIK writes:

I thank Stephen Schwartz for correcting my misspelling of Oehler and for offering other details about the Oehlerites well beyond my knowledge. However, his point that Oehler's group was not a Communist split-off but a Trotskyist split-off strikes me as, well, splitting hairs. The Trotskyists of that era were themselves a Communist splinter. Oehler had begun as a member of the Communist party, then split from it along with other Trotskyists, and then, together with a few others, split from the Trotskyists to form his own group.

Mr. Schwartz's encyclopedic knowledge of this stuff is admirable, but it seems to get in the way of linear thinking when he argues about the relationships among Max Shachtman, Trotskyism, and my own "comrades." That Shachtman had once been a Trotskyist is hardly at issue. My point was that by the time Tom Kahn and Paul Feldman became his disciples, he was no longer one, and was soon to disband his party and urge its members to follow him in joining the Socialist party. He had, he explained, reconsidered the entire Communist experience back to its roots in

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1917, and had concluded that the creation of the Communist movement by Lenin as a split-off from social democracy had been a "historical mistake." In this view of his, no trace of Trotskyism remained. (By engaging in this argument I realize that I, too, become vulnerable to the charge of splitting hairs, but since the label "Trotskyist" has gained new currency as a slur on neoconservatives, demonstrating its falsehood seems to me more than a scholastic exercise.)

Mr. Schwartz also taxes me with "elid[ing] a great deal of the complicated if perhaps ultimately irrelevant history of the . . . YPSL." For this I feel confident I have the reader's gratitude.

Ellen Heyman accuses me of suggesting that my comrades and I "sprang fully grown from the head of Zeus." If I gave any such impression, I wish to withdraw it. But the real problem here, I think, is that Ellen Heyman's view of our paternity is shaped by her own distinct history. She has told me that she grew up in a Shachtmanite home. Like her, I too was very influenced by the ideas of my parents; but unlike hers, mine were not Shachtmanites but rather devotees of the Socialist party of Norman Thomas. The same was true for Penn Kemble and indeed for more among my other comrades than those who claimed a Shachtmanite lineage. So if I have failed to acknowledge a paternal debt, it may not be to the pater she has in mind.

I did record, however, that Kahn and Feldman, who were a few years older than my cohort, had been Shachtmanites themselves, and Ellen Heyman would be right to say that Shachtman's influence on them was strong and enduring. She is not right, however, when she makes it sound as if Shachtman were the inventor of Left anti-Communism. There was a long, albeit uneven anti-Communist tradition among social democrats in many countries, including the U.S., dating all the way back to the time when Shachtman himself was still a Communist. Although Shachtman's speeches brilliantly evoked the horrors of Communism, his signature theory of "bureaucratic collectivism" never meant much to me or, as far as I know, to my fellows.

The distortion in Ellen Heyman's lens becomes especially evident when she suggests that Shachtman's influence is what led us to the civil-rights movement. I was active in that movement years before I ever heard of Shachtman, and again the same was true for Kemble as it was for Carl Gershman. As with others of our generation, it was the civil-rights struggle that led us into activism, where we eventually encountered Shachtman—not the other way around. We all regarded him as a wonderful orator and a great thinker, but his influence on us was not as momentous as it may have been on Ellen Heyman or those close to her.

I have taken much instruction from Midge Decter over the years, and am willing to be corrected on the subject of the genesis of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority. But I think I was not as far from the mark as she suggests when I wrote of Penn Kemble that CDM was one of the organizations "largely of his . . . invention."

It is said that defeat is an orphan; but CDM, although thoroughly defeated within the Democratic party as Midge Decter aptly points out, had many fathers. The prime mover was indeed Ben Wattenberg. But the idea for it, as he notes in a forthcoming memoir, had been suggested to him by his sometime co-author, Richard Scammon. To judge by Wattenberg's account, moreover, Midge Decter has understated her own hand in CDM's founding statement, of which he says she was the principal author.

Still, before it was decided even to draft such a statement, a small group had been meeting quietly in Washington to concoct the new organization. Wattenberg was the convener, and Kemble was one of the handful of participants. There are no minutes of those meetings, but since Penn had already created more organizations than anyone else involved, my guess is that his was an influential voice in the deliberations. It was also Penn more than anyone else who had the long, close ties to organized labor that brought in the financial backing that Midge Decter mentions. He was chosen early on to be the staff person for the nascent enterprise, and from the time CDM was formally launched, with Penn as its executive director, he largely gave it its direction. The maiden action (which did not enthuse everyone) of assailing Nixon's budget bore the earmarks of Penn's tactical style—zigging Left to zag Right—just as clearly as CDM's founding manifesto bore those of Midge Decter's distinctive prose.

I am reminded by Dan Fefferman's charming letter of why he was my favorite among the followers of Reverend Moon with whom we YPSL's did from time to time make common cause. I recall with particular relish a "rally against North Vietnamese imperialism" staged jointly by the YPSL and the Freedom Leadership Foundation (FLF), as these "Unificationists" called themselves, on the campus of the University of California at Berkeley. That took moxie, which is precisely what led us to ally with them in such ventures. Their virtue, as I saw it, was not, as Mr. Fefferman puts it, that they were "not extremists," but rather that they shared our militant anti-Communism. I did not think of them or of us as "moderates."

Perhaps the reason Mr. Fefferman is so sensitive on the question of who is a "moderate" and who an "extremist" is that Reverend Moon has, in recent years, found allies far more outré than us young socialists: notably, Louis Farrakhan. In 1998, the Unification Church hosted a visit to South Korea by a delegation from the Nation of Islam during which Farrakhan proclaimed Moon "immortal." In 2000 the two groups joined forces to sponsor a "Million Family March," a sequel to Farrakhan's 1995 "Million Man March." Mr. Fefferman bristles at the imputation that he and his coreligionists were or are anything but centrists; methinks he doth protest too much.

I thank Jonathan R. Cohen for his generous words. But if I may quibble, the

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INCEST AND INBREEDING AVOIDANCE: A CRITIQUE OF DARWINIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE

by Gregory C. Leavitt

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About the author: Gregory C. Leavitt is Associate Professor of Sociology and Director of Criminal Justice at Idaho State University. He earned his Ph.D. in Comparative Sociology and Criminology at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.

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collaboration between Penn and Ed Koch was a matter not so much of Penn's continuing his "New York activities" as of Koch's continuing his national and international interests even after leaving the U.S. Congress and becoming mayor of New York—which is much to his credit.

In private correspondence, Rachelle Horowitz, an old comrade who was at Brooklyn College with Paul Feldman and was an eyewitness to the event in question, has informed me that I erred in writing that Paul had once told a date to "put out or get out" atop a Ferris wheel. The venue, rather, was the apex of Coney Island's terrifying Cyclone roller coaster. My version understated his tactical genius.

Depression

TO THE EDITOR:

I am honored that my work has been given an extended critical essay by Algis Valiunas, but I want to correct one point and respond to another ["Sadness, Gladness—and Serotonin," January].

Contrary to what Mr. Valiunas writes, I am not the "trademark proponent" of Prozac and its fellow selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI's). In my book, *Listening to Prozac* (1993), I wrote that these medications are less effective than prior antidepressants in the treatment of severe depression. For minor depression, I suggested, psychotherapy remains the most important intervention. As for the SSRI's negative effects, although the research literature was equivocal, I sided with those who believed that new-onset suicidal thoughts, late-appearing neurological symptoms, and the development of tolerance for the drug were real risks.

My main interest, however, was not in Prozac's effects on health, for good or ill, but in its effects on the modern sense of self. I had observed, in some of my patients, dramatic responses to Prozac that seemed to go beyond the amelioration of illness to the alteration of personality traits. Because there were good theoretical grounds to believe that the medication was directly responsible, I used my observations as the basis for a consideration and criticism of what I called "cosmetic psychopharmacology," whereby medication might be used not to treat disease but to alter normal functions in desired or socially rewarded directions. I think it is fair to say that *Listening to Prozac* energized the study of "enhancement," a now burgeoning field within medical ethics.

As a reviewer noted when it appeared, the book might well have been titled *Worrying about Prozac*. Its central concern was cultural: did society favor frenetic assertiveness as a personality style, and would medications' ability to tweak temperament push us ever further in that direction? I favored a more neutral stance, in which the whole range of temperaments would be respected. In subsequent years, I began to hear the concerns I had voiced with respect to enhancement applied to the mainstream treatment of major depression—as if ameliorating mood disorder were also morally fraught. I wrote *Against Depression* in part to address that overgeneralization. I believe that depression has earned its status as a disease and that the ethical issues that attend its treatment, whether with medication or psychotherapy, parallel those that attend the treatment of other diseases.

Mr. Valiunas wants to contrast my position with that of Kay Jamison in her recent book *Exuberance*, but Jamison and I are largely in agreement on the main issue, namely, that sunny temperaments and emotional resilience have been underrated, particularly by intellectuals. I devote whole sections of *Against Depression* to this issue, asking why sanguine artists and scientists have been dismissed as lightweights. I speculate that the historical prevalence and intractability of depression have helped shape the cultural preference for "heroic melancholy," and I discuss the potential effects on our tastes and values of (future) more effective treatments.

Jamison's *Exuberance* is not at all "an answer to Kramer from within psychiatry." It is rather a sort of naturalist reply to Leon Kass and others who seem to argue that fulfillment can arise only from anguished striving. Both Jamison and I say that people to whom achievement comes easy, or at least without agonizing self-doubt, can also lead full moral lives.

Mr. Valiunas's praise for Jamison (who fills her book with case examples of people who look as if they inherited the traits I worried about as the goals of cosmesis) shows how much the conservative critique of psychiatry relies on faith in the natural as the good. Mr. Valiunas admires the "resilience, pluck, daring, and sparkle" of Teddy Roosevelt and others like that "riproaring statesman" in Jamison's gallery; presumably these robust, joyous types are moral because they arrive at their temperament honestly, through "cosmic accident." By this account, lucking into extreme resilience is admirable, while the restoration of quite modest resilience, through the medical treatment of depression, constitutes a suspect interference with what Mr. Valiunas calls "divine will."

I want to underscore a point that, to his credit, Mr. Valiunas (mostly) makes on my behalf. I appreciate the centrality, to the aware and self-aware life, of social and existential alienation. But I do not see the disease of major depression as necessary to that perspective—just as I do not see exuberance as incompatible with it. How strange it is to have to make such a disclaimer, though; it should go without saying that one can oppose depression vigorously while understanding what is at stake in the modern world.

When Mr. Valiunas reaches back to Jamison's account of her own manic depression, he comes closer to locating a point of disagreement. I do find that memoirs of mood disorder, hers included, tend to romanticize disease states. Mr. Valiunas quotes approvingly from her report that she learned from and found odd beauty in episodes of mania that involved psychosis and delusions. But as a society, we are in reasonable agreement that psychotic manic states are symptoms of disease. We do not refer to

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episodes of psychotic mania as *justified*—that is, as apt responses to the human condition or the state of society—as we might with depression. My new book will have achieved much of its purpose if it convinces readers that depressive episodes deserve the same status as episodes of mania. We may make creative use of them, as we make use of any extreme experience; all the same, they are bouts of illness, worthy of the efforts at prevention and treatment that would be applied toward any disease.

PETER D. KRAMER, M.D.
Brown University
Providence, Rhode Island

ALGIS VALIUNAS writes:

By calling Peter D. Kramer the trademark proponent of SSRI's, I by no means wished to suggest that he is a shill for the latest products of the pharmaceutical industry. Like any other good doctor, he numbers the dangerous side effects that drugs such as Prozac sometimes have, and he notes the therapeutic limitations of the SSRI's. Despite these reservations, however, Dr. Kramer makes clear that Prozac's effectiveness in ameliorating ordinary unhappiness has changed not only psychiatry but the very conception of the moral life. As he writes in *Listening to Prozac*,

> Is Prozac a good thing? By now, asking about the virtue of Prozac—and I am referring here not to its use in severely depressed patients but, rather, to its availability to alter personality—may seem like asking whether it was a good thing for Freud to have discovered the unconscious. . . . In time, I suspect we will come to discover that modern psychopharmacology has become, like Freud in his day, a whole climate of opinion under which we conduct our different lives.

Surely one can make no larger claim for the significance of a drug than this.

The practical triumphs of psychopharmacology that Dr. Kramer describes have all but assured the theoretical ascendancy of neurobiology as the defining science of human nature. Certainly in the popular mind, and to an alarming degree in the scientific conception, neural wiring has acquired the cachet of destiny, which Prozac is designed to overcome. The questions that I raise in my essay, and that Dr. Kramer scants in his books, concern the consequences for philosophy and religion that the ongoing conquest of nature, including *human* nature, will inevitably have.

Like Dr. Kramer and Kay Jamison, I believe that exuberance has been underrated, and that to take joy in being alive is the hallmark of a life well lived. I admit that a good deal of luck is involved in who gets to be joyous and who does not, while Dr. Kramer thinks such luck to be an injustice that widespread neurochemical intervention can make right.

Sometimes that intervention is absolutely the correct thing; there is nothing inherently heroic in depressive illness, which I would be happy to see wiped out. Yet, fond as I am of my own all too rare flights of exuberance, if a pill were available to make them more lasting or more intense, I do not believe I would take it—although I would not question for a moment the wisdom of taking other pills to quell mania or relieve depression.

To manufacture a neurochemically improved or even perfected self seems a violation of my own nature in a way that correcting an obvious pathology does not. Coming to terms with certain flaws in my nature that seem essential to who I am is indispensable to such happiness as I am capable of; trying to overcome those flaws by moral effort seems natural in a way that smoothing them out by cosmetic psychopharmacology never will.

The conservative critique of psychiatry does not make nature pure and simple out to be the good, for nature can be unmistakably pernicious. But prudence distinguishes between nature's grievous malignities and its ordinary imperfections. The former cry out for immediate relief by any means at hand; you learn to live, however uneasily, with the latter.

What I especially praised in Kay Jamison's character was not her embrace of manic extremity. It was her making a remarkably healthy life for herself despite the occasional horrors of mania and depression. I did point out that she would have chosen mania only so long as she had lithium to control it. The triumph of psychopharmacology is to allow her such a choice; the triumph of character is to wrestle with a terrifying affliction and come out on top as often as she has.

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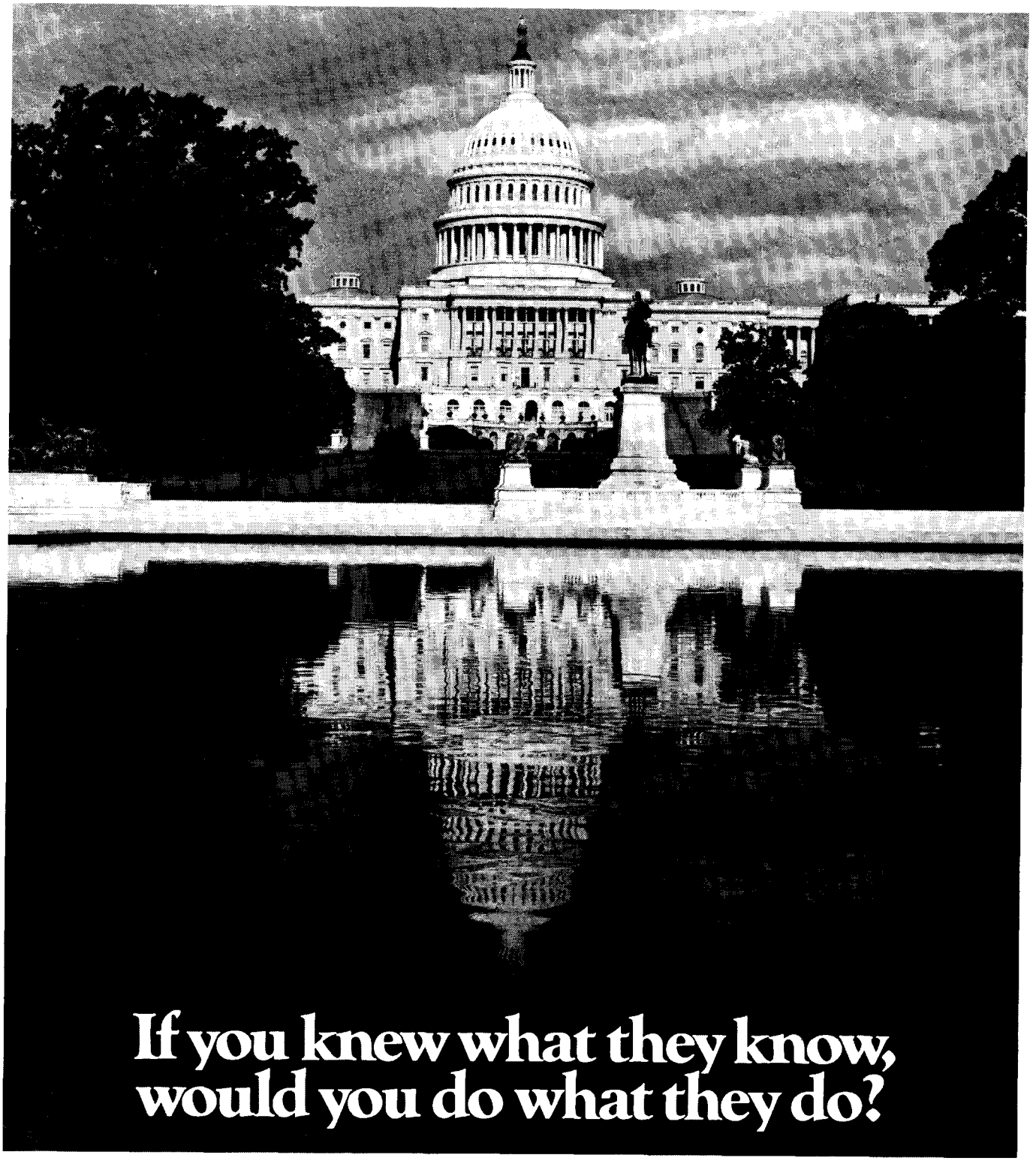

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Commentary
April 2006

How Corrupt Is the United Nations?

Claudia Rosett

RECENT YEARS have brought a cascade of scandals at the United Nations, of which the wholesale corruption of the Oil-for-Food relief program in Iraq has been only the most visible. We still do not know the full extent of these debacles—the more sensational ones include the disappearance of UN funds earmarked for tsunami relief in Indonesia and the exposure of a transnational network of pedophiliac rape by UN peacekeepers in Africa—and we may never know. What we do know is that an assortment of noble-sounding efforts has devolved into enterprises marked chiefly by abuse, self-dealing, and worse.

Seen by many, including many Americans, as the chief arbiter of legitimacy in global politics, the UN is understood by others to be the only institution standing between us and global anarchy. If that is so, the portents are not promising. The free world is grappling with threats from the spread of radical Islam to North Korea's nuclear blackmail and Iran's pursuit of nuclear bombs. The UN, despite its trophy case of Nobel prizes, has failed so far to curb any of these, just as it failed abysmally to run an honest or effective sanctions program in Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Currently it is gridlocked over matters as seemingly straightforward as cleaning up its own management department.

In the effort to address the UN's manifold problems, there have been audits, investigations, committees, reports, congressional hearings, action plans, and even a handful of arrests by U.S. federal prosecutors. There have been calls for Secretary-General Kofi Annan to step down before his second term expires at the end of this year. Solutions have been sought by way of better monitoring, whistleblower protection, the accretion of new oversight bodies, and another round of conditions attached to the payment of U.S. dues. On top of the broad reforms of the early 1990's, the sweeping reforms of 1997, the further reforms of 2002, and the world summit for reform in 2005, still more plans for reform are in the works.[1] To its external auditors, internal auditors, joint inspections unit, eminent-persons panels, executive boards, and many special consultants, the UN has recently added an Office of Ethics—now expected to introduce in May what will presumably become an annual event: "UN Ethics Day."

Is any of this likely to help? Behind the specific scandals lies what one of the UN's own internal auditors has termed a "culture of impunity." A grand

CLAUDIA ROSETT, *a journalist in residence with the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, is at work on a book about the United Nations in the age of terror. Her article, "The Oil-for-Food Scam: What Did Kofi Annan Know, and When Did He Know It?," appeared in the May 2004* COMMENTARY. *In 2005 she won both the Mightier Pen award and the Eric Breindel award for excellence in opinion journalism.*

[1] The latest, announced by Annan as this article was going to press, is aimed at cleaning up management; revolutionary though it sounds, there is no guarantee it will be implemented, and in any case it stops well short of what is needed.

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committee that reports to itself alone, the UN operates with great secrecy and is shielded by diplomatic immunity. One of its prime defenses, indeed, is the sheer impenetrability of its operations: after more than 60 years as a global collective, it has become a welter of so many overlapping programs, far-flung projects, quietly vested interests, nepotistic shenanigans, and interlocking directorates as to defy accurate or easy comprehension, let alone responsible supervision.

But let us try.

ONE CLEAR sign of how badly things have gone with the UN is the difficulty of tallying even so basic a sum as the system's real budget. Nowhere does the UN present a full and clear set of accounts, and statistics vary even within individual agencies and programs.

The UN's current "core" annual budget is $1.9 billion—but the "core" is itself but a fraction of the actual budget. Around it are wrapped billions more in funding provided by "voluntary contributions" from private and corporate donors, foundations, and member states, including, to a large extent, the United States. These sums are shuffled around in various ways, with UN agencies in some instances paying or donating to each other. For instance, the UN Development Program (UNDP) operates with its own "core" budget of about $900 million a year but handles about $3 billion per year—or, depending on whom you ask and what you count, $4.5 billion per year.

According to Mark Malloch Brown, the UN chief of staff who has just been promoted to the post of Deputy Secretary-General, the total budget for all operations under direct control of the Secretariat comes to roughly $8-9 billion per year. Adding in just a few of the larger agencies like UNDP (at, let us say, $4 billion), UNICEF ($2 billion or so), and the World Food Program ($2-3 billion) already brings the grand total to somewhere between $16 and $18 billion, again depending on whom you listen to and what you count. On UN websites devoted to procurement, where the idea is not to minimize the official amount of UN spending but on the contrary to attract suppliers to a large and thriving operation, the estimate of money spent yearly on goods and services by the entire UN system comes to $30 billion, or more than 15 times the core budget of $1.9 billion on which reformers have focused.

Staff numbers are likewise a matter of mystery. The new ethics office proposes to offer its services to 29,000 UN employees worldwide. That number is well short of the total staff of the Secretariat plus the specialized agencies alone, which, according to Malloch Brown, consists of some 40,000 people. And that figure itself does not include local staffs—such as the 20,000 Palestinians who work for the UN Works and Relief Agency (UNWRA) or the many employees, some long-term, others transient, at hundreds of assorted UN offices, projects, and operations worldwide, or the more than 85,000 peacekeepers sent by member states but carrying out UN orders and eating UN-supplied rations bought via UN purchasing departments. Whereas the number of UN member states has almost quadrupled since 1945 (from 51 to 191), the number of personnel has swollen many times over, from a few thousand into somewhere in the six figures.

LITTLE OF this system is open to any real scrutiny even within the UN, and no single authority outside the UN has proved able to compel any genuine accounting. Moreover, even though there can no longer be any doubt that the scale of the rot is large, the UN's top management continues to insist to the contrary. Take the central scandal of recent UN history—namely, Oil-for-Food. Last October, Paul Volcker's UN-authorized probe into Oil-for-Food submitted its fifth and final report on that relief program, which in its seven years of operation had become a vehicle for billions in kickbacks, payoffs, and sanctions-busting arms traffic. By January of this year, after first having declared that he was taking responsibility for the debacle, Kofi Annan was spinning a different story, telling a London audience that "only one staff member was found to maybe have taken some $150,000 out of a $64-billion program."

This was an artful lie. The staff member in question was Benon Sevan, whom Annan had appointed to run Oil-for-Food for six of its seven years. If indeed Sevan took no more than this relative pittance, then Saddam Hussein scored the biggest bargain in the history of kickbacks. According to Senator Norm Coleman's independent investigation into Oil-for-Food, the real figure for Sevan's take was $1.2 million. Clearing up this discrepancy is difficult, however, because Sevan, who was allowed by Annan to retire to his native Cyprus on full UN pension, is outside the reach of U.S. law and has denied taking anything.

In any case, the corruption hardly ended with Sevan. Instances that appear to have slipped the Secretary-General's mind include another member of his inner circle, the French diplomat Jean-Bernard Merimée, who by his own admission took

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a payoff from Saddam while serving as Annan's handpicked envoy to the European Union. Within the UN agencies working with Annan's Secretariat on Oil-for-Food, Volcker confirmed "numerous [further] allegations of corrupt behavior and practices," embracing "bid-rigging, conflicts of interest, bribery, theft, nepotism, and sexual harassment." He also noted that the UN lacked controls on graft, failed to investigate many cases, and failed to act upon some of those it did explore. Finally, Volcker calculated that UN agencies had kept for themselves at least $50 million earmarked to buy relief for the people of Iraq.[2]

Nor do the sheer monetary amounts even begin to convey the extent of the damage done by UN labors in Iraq. Annan's office had the mandate of the Security Council, plus a $1.4-billion budget, to check oil and relief contracts for price fiddles, to monitor oil exports in order to prevent smuggling, and to audit UN operations. In the event, Oil-for-Food spent far more money renovating its offices in New York than checking the terms of Saddam's contracts, and ignored the smuggling even when Saddam in 2000 opened a pipeline to Syria. The result of what Annan now placidly describes as "instances of mismanagement"—as if someone forgot to reload the office printer—was that Saddam skimmed and smuggled anywhere from $12 billion (according to the incomplete numbers supplied by Volcker) to $17 billion or more (according to the more comprehensive totals provided by Senator Coleman's staff).

And what did Saddam do with those profits? What Annan describes as "instances of mismanagement" did not simply entail theft, corruption, and waste. They enriched and supported a tyrant and a mass murderer. Saddam used his UN-blessed loot not only to build palaces and buy luxury cars but also to provide patronage to loyal Baathists, reward Palestinian suicide bombers, and restock his arsenal, conventional or otherwise. When CIA chief weapons inspector Charles Duelfer went to Iraq in 2004 looking for weapons, the money trail took him straight to the UN relief operation, which, as he would report, had become a shill for an arms and illicit-money network that reached through Syria to Belarus and Russia. The network was buying "milk" from a Chinese weapons manufacturer, contracting for "vehicles" and "detergent" with Sudan, and negotiating for missiles with North Korea.

And that is only Oil-for-Food. Since last summer, the UN has been bedeviled by a bribery scandal centered in its procurement department, which handles the Secretariat's buying of everything from paperclips to peacekeeper rations. In August, a UN staffer named Alexander Yakovlev pleaded guilty in federal court to taking hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of bribes, involving possibly hundreds of millions' worth of tainted contracts—many of them in force to this day. In September, Vladimir Kuznetsov, the head of the UN budget oversight committee, had to step aside under federal indictment as Yakovlev's co-conspirator in wire fraud and money laundering. With the scandal still spreading, a number of other UN employees are now under investigation in cases involving something on the order of $1 billion in UN contracts.

There have also been cases in which, although no corruption has been alleged, clear conflicts of interest have been disclosed. Thus, Volcker found that in 1997, Maurice Strong, a longtime UN Under-Secretary General, accepted a check bankrolled by Saddam in the amount of $988,885. Strong (who has denied knowing where the money came from) was then serving as chief coordinator of UN reform, no less. Another top adviser to Annan, Giandomenico Picco, was discovered to have served in late 1999 and early 2000 as both a UN Under-Secretary General and chairman of the board of a company called IHC Services.[3] The company had close ties to the bribe-taking Yakovlev and signed millions of dollars in contracts with the UN while Picco was running one of Annan's pet projects, the Dialogue of Civilizations.

Then there is the saga of Annan's son, Kojo, who turned out to have received more than $195,000 from a major UN Oil-for-Food contractor, Cotecna Inspection, after he had formally stopped working for it. In investigating Kojo's UN-related ventures, Volcker came across the paper trail of a by-now famous green Mercedes: in 1998, Kojo had saved some $20,000 by buying this car at a diplomatic discount in Germany and shipping it duty-free into Ghana, all under the false use of his father's name and diplomatic privileges and of the UN seal.

Oil-for-Food has been described by Annan and his aides as a mistake in a good cause; such, they suggest, is the occasional if regrettable cost of doing the world's humanitarian business. Structurally, however, Oil-for-Food was not an exception. It was a template of what the UN has become.

[2] There is also the mystery still surrounding more than $19 billion's worth of oil revenues supposedly doled out by the UN to victims of Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait. Internal audits released last year under pressure from Congress warned of overpayments of up to $4 billion. Volcker promised to investigate, but never did.

[3] The discovery was made by me and George Russell of Fox News.

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A hallmark of Oil-for-Food was that it was funded not by an assembly of UN member states but directly by Saddam as a function of his oil sales. This effectively bypassed the UN's version of the appropriations process, and was hardly the kind of setup envisioned when the organization was founded. As U.S. Ambassador John Bolton has noted, "It is the member states who are supposed to control the money."

Nevertheless, the UN negotiated terms with Saddam under which the Secretariat would collect 2.2 percent of his oil revenues to cover its costs in running and monitoring the relief program. With oil sales topping $64 billion, that meant $1.4 billion for the Secretary-General's administrative spending over the seven-year life of the program. In other words, the UN Secretariat was being paid big money by Saddam to supervise Saddam—an intrinsic conflict of interest that surely played a part in the expansion and easy corruption of the program. On top of whatever bribery he managed to deploy, Saddam became for a time one of the largest direct contributors to the Secretariat's budget. Publicizing itself as Saddam's probation officer, the UN in effect became his business partner.

But Saddam was only one, if the most virulent, of the many questionable business partners the UN has acquired over the past decade or so. These days, "partnering" at the UN goes far beyond enlisting the help of Angelina Jolie to visit refugees or of Bono to lecture Americans on development policy. Under Annan's management, the UN has been avidly seeking liaisons with foundations, non-governmental organizations, and private business—especially big corporate donors endowed with ready cash. This has been hailed in many quarters, including in Washington, as an innovative way of funding good works. It is rather more alarming than that.

THE STAR example of today's UN partnerships is the Secretariat's cozy arrangement with the media magnate Ted Turner, who in 1997 made a landmark offer to donate $1 billion to the world organization. The pledge reportedly caused Jane Fonda, Turner's wife at the time, to weep with joy; as for Annan, he welcomed the deal as "a model to demonstrate my commitment to engage the private sector in a concrete manner." Turner said he hoped his example would inspire others—and it has.

Whatever Turner's ultimate aims may have been in undertaking this deed of seemingly astounding generosity, one of its chief beneficiaries has arguably been Ted Turner himself. For the past eight years, in exchange for the rather less than $1 billion disbursed so far, he has enjoyed a seat at the head table of what is supposed to be an impartial public institution, wielding access and influence beyond that of many actual UN member states. Like the UN's 2.2-percent commission under Oil-for-Food, moreover, Turner's funds flow through the administrative channels of the Secretariat without even the minimal checks that might be provided by the budgeting process of the General Assembly.

To dispense his largesse in tax-deductible form, Turner set up a Washington-based non-profit organization, the UN Foundation, stipulating that he would turn over his gift through this foundation at the rate of $100 million per year. (Since then he has halved his annual disbursements, thus stretching out the arrangement even longer than the projected decade or more.) At the same time, and as part of the same gift, he set up a sister organization, the Better World Fund, which describes itself as "a key advocate for the UN on Capitol Hill." A portion of Turner's gift to the UN thus goes not to the world's poor but to lobbying efforts in Washington to extract more dollars for the UN from U.S. taxpayers. Over the past eight years, according to the UN Foundation, the Better World Fund has devoted more than $110 million to this effort.

Of course, Washington is home to many lobbying groups. But Turner's setup is so intimately linked with the UN Secretariat as to make it hard to distinguish where the one ends and the other begins. Thus, to handle Turner's gift, the UN created a special in-house division dedicated exclusively to interacting with Turner's foundation and reporting directly to the Secretary-General. This division is called the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships, or UNFIP. According to the head of UNFIP, Amir Dossal, the relationship between UN and UN Foundation officials is "pretty much a seamless exercise," with Turner's Foundation often involved from the inception in shaping UN projects that it then pays for. UNFIP staff, who evaluate these projects as UN insiders for the approval of the Secretary-General, have their salaries and expenses paid not by the UN but by Turner's foundation.

Since the arrangement began, some $600 million of Turner's own money has flowed into UN causes in this way, plus another $350 million from other donors contributing via his UN Foundation. (The total of $950 million includes the $110 million spent by the Better World Fund in lobbying Congress.) This has allowed the Secretary-General to control, through UNFIP alone—and in concert

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with the wishes of Turner's foundation—what in many ways qualifies as an annual slush fund of more than $100 million.

Many of the projects involve worthy causes like sending malaria medicine and measles vaccines to children in poor countries. But others approved by the Secretary-General have directed millions in Turner money to departments within his own Secretariat, including in some cases his own executive office. Featuring as opaque one-line items in UNFIP's sometimes tardy public reports, these endeavors have included $1 million for "Strengthening the UN Secretariat"; $1.9 million for "UN Dialogue with the Global South"; $994,875 for "Supporting UN Management Reform"; $1.9 million for the Secretariat's department of public information (on which more below); $117,600 for a "Multi-Stakeholder Meeting on Best Practices in Partnerships"; and $319,988 for "Strengthening Public-Private Partnerships"—a somewhat reflexive exercise, one might think, for what is already a highly muscular public-private liaison.

In general, oversight at the UN is conducted by the organization's internal audit department, whose director is named by the Secretary-General and whose reports until this year have not been disclosed even to member states. According to a secret internal audit submitted in 2003, UNFIP appeared to be operating "without legally established functions and organizational structures." Specific irregularities in the program's conduct included the release of $1.2 million in Turner-foundation money to Annan's executive office in a manner "constitut[ing] a breach of internal controls." Small stuff, perhaps, when measured against the overall size of Turner's gift, but a significant sum to be sloshing around within the single most influential office at the UN.

In September 2001, Turner intervened even more deeply in UN matters, giving $31 million from his separate, family-run Turner Foundation (devoted to the environmental "totality of the planet") to the U.S. State Department to cover a portion of U.S. arrears on UN dues. This was greeted by many, including then-U.S. Ambassador to the UN, John Negroponte, as a selfless act of philanthropy. But the reason we had fallen behind in our dues was not any lack of resources but the fact that Congress—which is supposed to control U.S. funding for the UN—had been trying to lever better behavior out of it.

Why the State Department accepted the money is a question unto itself. But from the UN's point of view, splicing Turner's millions into the process meant that, as long as the organization could find wealthy private patrons in tune with its policy preferences, it could afford to be that much less answerable to a powerful member state and its democratically elected representatives.

Increasingly, since the Turner pledge of 1997, the UN has been inviting wealthy patrons around the globe to collaborate with it as "partners." Some of those answering the call have signed on through Turner's foundation. Of these, a number are governmental institutions. They include the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the U.S. (no doubt an instance of Taiwan trying to get a foot in the door at the UN in any way it can), the World Bank (an instance of the UN system paying itself), the U.S. Agency for International Development (an instance of the U.S. government funding the UN via Turner's foundation), the government of Akwa Ibom state in Nigeria (itself a recipient of World Bank aid), and the American Red Cross. Others are private foundations, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which since 1995 has given more than $380 million to the UN, more than $50 million of that through Turner's foundation. And Turner's foundation has also collaborated on some projects with the Open Society Institute of the financier George Soros, whose global network of foundations and institutes has its own roster of projects jointly funded with the UN.[4]

In 1999, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Annan proposed a "Global Compact" between the UN and business leaders. To join, a company is required to write a letter, addressed to the Secretary-General, "expressing support for the Global Compact and its principles." Thereafter, it is required to publish in its annual report "a description of the ways in which it is supporting the Global Compact."[5]

According to the UN, the Global Compact has

[4] In the words of Mark Malloch Brown, who headed the UN Development Program from 1999 to 2005, Soros and UNDP "collaborate extensively." In fact, Malloch Brown lives in a house on Soros's estate outside New York City. This potential conflict of interest was never disclosed by the UN or Soros, and even after it was revealed in the press, no documentation has been forthcoming to show that the relationship is at arm's length.

[5] The original terms of the compact included some anodyne language about human rights, labor standards, and the environment; in 2004, perhaps inspired by its own mishaps, the UN added a proviso that businesses should work against corruption. This has been a source of bemusement to investigators of graft in the UN's procurement division, not least because one of the major contractors embroiled in the bid-rigging scandal was a member in good standing of Annan's Global Compact.

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by now amassed more than 2,400 participants in 50 countries. They are invited to host outreach programs involving UN agencies, to promote UN causes, and to contribute in cash or in kind to UN endeavors. No doubt many do so for entirely worthy reasons; but the utter balkanization of UN agencies, offices, operations, budgets, and organizational charts makes it virtually impossible to know for sure. In a 352-page book published in 2002 on "Building Partnerships," the UN itself acknowledged that there is "inconsistency, both within the United Nations system and more widely, on what constitutes the private sector." It might be more accurate to say that under the stewardship of Annan, there has been a considerable blurring of the lines.

Characteristic of this is the UN's increasing willingness to franchise out both its name and its official emblem. Back in 1946, as that emblem was about to be approved, the first UN Secretary-General, Trygve Lie, stressed the importance of protecting it from abuse for "commercial purposes." In 2000, as part of the UN's grand plans for "public-private partnerships" in the new millennium, Annan issued lengthy guidelines in which he stipulated that the UN could in fact authorize use of its emblem by a business engaged in promotion or fund-raising for the UN itself—as long as "generation of profit by the business entity is only incidental." This raises intriguing questions about who in Annan's graft-ridden UN might be qualified to judge whether commercial profits are "incidental" to humanitarian work—and who could possibly keep track.

AND THAT brings us to a feature of the UN system, mentioned early on, that has helped to shield it from thoroughgoing investigation. Since its founding, the institution has added untold numbers of agencies, funds, commissions, programs, "ad-hoc bodies," and "other entities," to the point where most of the UN's own personnel do not know who reports to whom, or how. The Secretary-General himself, when questioned last year by the Volcker commission, professed not to understand his own chain of command.

To anyone seeking to capture fresh turf at the UN, creating one of these new bodies has long been a favored path. The Secretary-General appoints or at least nominates the heads of most of them, but each has its own board, its own agenda, and in many cases its own program for soliciting funds. To name just a few of the better-known ones: UNICEF (founded in 1946); the World Food Program (or WFP, 1961); the UN Commission on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 1964); the UN Development Program (UNDP, 1966); the UN Environment Program (UNEP, 1972); the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS, 1994), UN-Habitat (1997); the World Tourism Agency (UNWTO, 2003); and so forth.

Many of these overlap. Most, when probed, open onto ever-receding vistas of regional offices, working groups, and the like. The offices are scattered around the globe, from New York to Rome to Nairobi to Tunis to Madrid to Bangkok and beyond. Periodic efforts to streamline and harmonize the system tend mainly to paint yet another layer on top. Typical of this is one of the Secretary-General's latest initiatives, launched just this past February: the "High-Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence in Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance, Environment." Among its fifteen "high-level" panelists is a senior fellow from Turner's UN Foundation.

Another example, launched last fall, is Annan's so-called Alliance of Civilizations. This grand-sounding initiative is in fact a rather restricted project of Spain, Turkey, and 20 unelected "eminent persons" picked by the Secretary-General, most of whom (like Nafis Sadik, a special adviser to Annan and a director of Turner's UN Foundation) have already spent years on the same UN conference circuits. Instructed to come up with an "action plan" to "bridge divides," the Alliance has so far served mainly as a vehicle for Annan to resurrect as a "special adviser" his former chief of staff, Iqbal Riza, who "retired" in early 2005 after Volcker's discovery that he had shredded three years' worth of UN executive-suite documents potentially germane to the Oil-for-Food investigation.

There is almost no way to hold the UN accountable for most of what goes on in this growing empire. No national legal jurisdiction applies to the UN network and no media corps has the resources, or for that matter the interest, to deal with the entire network. Despite a Secretary-General who wields more control than anyone else in the system, accountability ultimately does not reside with him, either. In fact, there is no procedure at the UN for impeaching or firing the Secretary-General.

There is, however, a tremendous machine for glossing over anything that goes wrong. The Secretariat fields a department of public information with an $85-million annual budget and more than 700 employees, about half of whom staff UN public-relations offices in more than 100 countries worldwide. On top of that, a public-relations staff

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is employed by each of the many agencies, commissions, and so forth. All of this promotional activity is further supplemented by the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA), founded in Luxembourg in 1946 and now boasting more than 100 national chapters. The American chapter, UNA-USA, fields more than 175 community-based chapters and organizations, with nearly 20,000 members.

Bringing these various strands together is a dizzying array of interwoven boards, working groups, and staff positions both within and around the UN. To give a few quick examples: Ted Turner, of the UN Foundation, sits on the board of the UNA-USA. Maurice Strong—chief coordinator of the 1997 UN "reforms," which among other things created the framework for the Turner-dedicated UNFIP—then became a charter member of the board of Turner's UN Foundation while serving as a special adviser to UN Secretary-General Annan, and is also a past president and current honorary president of the WFUNA. Paul Volcker, when tapped by Annan himself to head the Oil-for-Food investigation, was serving not only on the board of directors of UNA-USA but also as a director of its business council—which advertises itself as a networking resource for businesses interested in getting a piece of the billions in UN contracts handed out every year. Only when the media finally discovered and questioned this potential conflict of interest did Volcker resign.

Asked in a recent interview about the dangers of collusion between big business and a public institution like the UN, Mark Malloch Brown declared indignantly that the UN was doing "God's work," and walked out.

Is it? The question is important because, in the end, the amount of money lost to waste by the UN, or skimmed through graft, or dumped wholesale into agencies, commissions, and alliances that serve mainly themselves, or devoted in the UN's name to select private crusades, arguably counts less than the kind of agenda all this money supports.

The founding purpose of the UN was to bring peace and prosperity to the globe. As to the former, the UN in the age of terror has been in most ways useless and in some ways positively dangerous. The lesson that Saddam Hussein quickly grasped was that the UN lends itself to money-laundering. With its big flows of funds across borders, its many contractors and public-private partnerships, its gigantic bureaucracy and lax controls, its diplomatic immunity, and its culture of impunity, the UN operation is a prime candidate not only for graft but, as Charles Duelfer discovered, for arms deals masked as medicine and soap. Further protecting those arms deals, and the rogues and tyrants making them, is the fact that in its capacity as a deliberative body, the UN has repeatedly urged appeasement in the face of real threats to world peace and just as repeatedly tried to constrain those (like the U.S. and its allies) willing to act to remove them.

If there is any priority that the UN, with its mandate for peace, might be expected to stress, it is preventing rogue regimes from getting nuclear bombs. But as a practical matter, the organization has behaved for the most part as a spectator. Its record with Saddam Hussein is too well known to bear repeating. In the case of North Korea, admitted as a member state in 1991, the UN has responded to Kim Jong Il's nuclear-weapons program mainly by kicking the problem over to the U.S. and making itself irrelevant. On Iran, the UN "debate" has served mainly to buy time for the mullahs while the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Mohamed El Baradei, the head of the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency, ponders the "uncertainties" of Iran's nuclear program.

On matters involving Israel and the Palestinians—unlike nuclear proliferation, this may be the UN's one genuine obsession—hypocrisy has been outdone only by mischief-making and blatant anti-Semitism. UN programs set up to help the Palestinians over the past half-century have not only failed to produce decent lives but have helped create a culture of entitlement and violence—fueled in large part by the UN's own anti-Israel agenda. The UN condemnation of Zionism as racism in 1975, finally repealed in 1991, was followed by the grotesque transformation of the UN's 2001 Durban conference on racism into an anti-Semitic festival. The UN Security Council invites totalitarian Syria to take the chair, but democratic Israel has never been so much as allowed to hold a seat.

Then there is peacekeeping, which since the end of the cold war has been a boom area for the UN. Here again the expansion of UN missions has brought everything from widespread allegations of corruption to drug-dealing to rape and the sexual exploitation of hungry children—"Sex-for-Food," as the columnist Mark Steyn has aptly put it. In large parts of the undeveloped world, the appearance of blue-helmeted forces has come to signal a warning: stay away, and keep your children away.

But neither have those blue-helmeted forces been visible when and where they might actually be

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needed. Provided with manpower plus a budget that ought to qualify the UN itself as a formidable military power, the organization stood passively aside during the massacres in Rwanda and Srebrenica and has yet to act in the case of Sudan. Indeed, it has yet to muster even the integrity to kick Sudan off its Geneva-based human-rights commission, which has doubled as a clubhouse for the world's worst regimes. (Current members include China, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, and Zimbabwe.)[6]

As for disaster relief, the record is similarly deplorable. When the tsunami hit Asia in December 2004, the U.S. and countries like Australia rushed to help the victims. The UN rushed to help itself. Demanding exclusive rights to direct the aid effort (and the money), UN officials warned loudly of a health crisis that never materialized, denounced the U.S. as "stingy," and promised transparent use of funds. A year later, the *Financial Times* reported that, from what little could be gleaned of the UN's largely incomplete or secret accounts, the organization's expenditures on overhead (i.e., travel, hotel rooms, lavishly funded international talk-fests, and the like) were triple those of private charities.

If such is the general nature of the UN's contribution to peace and humanitarian assistance, its contribution to global prosperity is a similar story. The simple and true recipe for wealth is liberty framed by the decent rule of law; the great lesson of the last century, learned at horrific cost, is that central planners and state development schemes are a brew that tends not toward prosperity but toward dictatorship and economic immiseration. In 1990, that lesson seemed briefly to have been learned: as the Soviet Union headed for collapse, the global aid profession was atwitter over the newfound virtues of privatization. But in the sixteen years since then, the UN, in the name of "sustainable development," has fostered a comeback of command-and-control planning, courtesy of the same bureaucracy that cannot even account for its own expenditures.

An enormous amount of UN activity now revolves around the so-called Millennium Goals, which aim to cut world poverty in half by the year 2015. This noble-sounding goal serves as a framework for calculating to the last decimal point a set of targets for which the UN system then decides how resources should be apportioned. UN agencies, agendas, working groups, and a never-ending succession of conferences, declarations, and plans testify to a determination to control the global climate, horn in on the Internet, and—à la Oil-for-Food—impose a UN-supervised income tax on the entire developed world. Where once the Soviet agency Gosplan issued five-year plans for an imprisoned people, the UN now aims to administer and profit from fifteen-year plans for the entire human community. Think of it as planetary socialism, supported and financed in "partnership" with private capital.

THE UNITED NATIONS was founded as a forum of governments. As we had ample occasion to learn over the decades, this arrangement presented quite enough problems of its own. Now the UN, in contravention of its own charter, is rapidly evolving into something larger, more corporate, and more menacing: a predatory, undemocratic, unaccountable, and self-serving vehicle for global government. Like the Soviet Union of old, the UN is unwieldy, gross, inefficient, and incompetent; it is also so configured as to reach deep into the national politics of its member states and, by sheer weight and persistence, to force at least some of the worst of its agenda upon all of us.

There will never be enough John Boltons to counter all of this—not that it was easy to come up with even one. Indeed, with notable exceptions, generations of American officials and policy-makers have been content, sometimes for reasons of state, sometimes for reasons of convenience, to look away from the UN's multiform deficiencies and derelictions while occasionally indulging in minor punitive measures like withholding a proportion of our annual dues—akin to docking a delinquent's bus money while continuing to pay for his liquor and his car. For many others in public life, and for many ordinary citizens as well, the institution itself, as the very embodiment of the multilateralist ideal, is still held in nearly sacred regard.

All the more reason, then, to force ourselves at long last to take a hard, undeceived look at what the institution has in fact become, put aside the lengthy and futile quest for its reform, and begin to think more concretely about how, with or without it, we can best work to advance the interests and values of ourselves and other members of the civilized world.

—March 8, 2006

[6] UN promises to "reform" have translated into a plan to replace the Human Rights Commission with a "Human Rights Council," a largely semantic exercise. Attempts by Washington to hold out for genuine reform of this body central to the United Nations mandate have turned into an occasion for UN officials and others to criticize not the world's worst human-rights offenders but the U.S.

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Islam's Imperial Dreams

Efraim Karsh

When satirical depictions of the prophet Muhammad in a Danish newspaper sparked a worldwide wave of Muslim violence early this year, observers naturally focused on the wanton destruction of Western embassies, businesses, and other institutions. Less attention was paid to the words that often accompanied the riots—words with ominous historical echoes. "Hurry up and apologize to our nation, because if you do not, you will regret it," declared Khaled Mash'al, the leader of Hamas, fresh from the Islamist group's sweeping victory in the Palestinian elections:

> This is because our nation is progressing and is victorious. . . . By Allah, you will be defeated. . . . Tomorrow, our nation will sit on the throne of the world. This is not a figment of the imagination but a fact. Tomorrow we will lead the world, Allah willing. Apologize today, before remorse will do you no good.

Among Islamic radicals, such gloating about the prowess and imminent triumph of their "nation" is as commonplace as recitals of the long and bitter catalog of grievances related to the loss of historical Muslim dominion. Osama bin Laden has repeatedly alluded to the collapse of Ottoman power at the end of World War I and, with it, the abolition of the Ottoman caliphate. "What America is tasting now," he declared in the immediate wake of 9/11, "is only a copy of what we have tasted. Our Islamic nation has been tasting the same for more than 80 years, of humiliation and disgrace, its sons killed and their blood spilled, its sanctities desecrated." Ayman al-Zawahiri, bin Laden's top deputy, has pointed still farther into the past, lamenting "the tragedy of al-Andalus"—that is, the end of Islamic rule in Spain in 1492.

These historical claims are in turn frequently dismissed by Westerners as delusional, a species of mere self-aggrandizement or propaganda. But the Islamists are perfectly serious, and know what they are doing. Their rhetoric has a millennial warrant, both in doctrine and in fact, and taps into a deep undercurrent that has characterized the political culture of Islam from the beginning. Though tempered and qualified in different places and at different times, the Islamic longing for unfettered suzerainty has never disappeared, and has resurfaced in our own day with a vengeance. It goes by the name of empire.

"I was ordered to fight all men until they say, 'There is no god but Allah.'" With these farewell words, the prophet Muhammad summed up the international vision of the faith he brought

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to the world. As a universal religion, Islam envisages a global political order in which all humankind will live under Muslim rule as either believers or subject communities. In order to achieve this goal, it is incumbent on all free, male, adult Muslims to carry out an uncompromising "struggle in the path of Allah," or jihad. As the 14th-century historian and philosopher Abdel Rahman ibn Khaldun wrote, "In the Muslim community, the jihad is a religious duty because of the universalism of the Islamic mission and the obligation [to convert] everybody to Islam either by persuasion or by force."

As a historical matter, the birth of Islam was inextricably linked with empire. Unlike Christianity and the Christian kingdoms that once existed under or alongside it, Islam has never distinguished between temporal and religious powers, which were combined in the person of Muhammad. Having fled from his hometown of Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E. to become a political and military leader rather than a private preacher, Muhammad spent the last ten years of his life fighting to unify Arabia under his rule. Indeed, he devised the concept of jihad shortly after his migration to Medina as a means of enticing his local followers to raid Meccan caravans. Had it not been for his sudden death, he probably would have expanded his reign well beyond the peninsula.

The Qur'anic revelations during Muhammad's Medina years abound with verses extolling the virtues of jihad, as do the countless sayings and traditions (*hadith*) attributed to the prophet. Those who participate in this holy pursuit are to be generously rewarded, both in this life and in the afterworld, where they will reside in shaded and evergreen gardens, indulged by pure women. Accordingly, those killed while waging jihad should not be mourned: "Allah has bought from the believers their soul and their possessions against the gift of Paradise; they fight in the path of Allah; they kill and are killed. . . . So rejoice in the bargain you have made with Him; that is the mighty triumph."

But the doctrine's appeal was not just otherworldly. By forbidding fighting and raiding within the community of believers (the *umma*), Muhammad had deprived the Arabian tribes of a traditional source of livelihood. For a time, the prophet could rely on booty from non-Muslims as a substitute for the lost war spoils, which is why he never went out of his way to convert all of the tribes seeking a place in his Pax Islamica. Yet given his belief in the supremacy of Islam and his relentless commitment to its widest possible dissemination, he could hardly deny conversion to those wishing to undertake it. Once the whole of Arabia had become Muslim, a new source of wealth and an alternative outlet would have to be found for the aggressive energies of the Arabian tribes, and it was, in the Fertile Crescent and the Levant.

WITHIN TWELVE years of Muhammad's death, a Middle Eastern empire, stretching from Iran to Egypt and from Yemen to northern Syria, had come into being under the banner of Islam. By the early 8th century, the Muslims had hugely extended their grip to Central Asia and much of the Indian subcontinent, had laid siege to the Byzantine capital of Constantinople, and had overrun North Africa and Spain. Had they not been contained in 732 at the famous battle of Poitiers in west central France, they might well have swept deep into northern Europe.

Though sectarianism and civil war divided the Muslim world in the generations after Muhammad, the basic dynamic of Islam remained expansionist. The short-lived Umayyad dynasty (661-750) gave way to the ostensibly more pious Abbasid caliphs, whose readiness to accept non-Arabs solidified Islam's hold on its far-flung possessions. From their imperial capital of Baghdad, the Abbasids ruled, with waning authority, until the Mongol invasion of 1258. The most powerful of their successors would emerge in Anatolia, among the Ottoman Turks who invaded Europe in the mid-14th century and would conquer Constantinople in 1453, destroying the Byzantine empire and laying claim to virtually all of the Balkan peninsula and the eastern Mediterranean.

Like their Arab predecessors, the Ottomans were energetic empire-builders in the name of jihad. By the early 16th century, they had conquered Syria and Egypt from the Mamluks, the formidable slave soldiers who had contained the Mongols and destroyed the Crusader kingdoms. Under Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, they soon turned northward. By the middle of the 17th century they seemed poised to overrun Christian Europe, only to be turned back in fierce fighting at the gates of Vienna in 1683—on September 11, of all dates. Though already on the defensive by the early 18th century, the Ottoman empire—the proverbial "sick man of Europe"—would endure another 200 years. Its demise at the hands of the victorious European powers of World War I, to say nothing of the work of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the father of modern Turkish nationalism, finally brought an end both to the Ottoman caliphate itself and to Islam's centuries-long imperial reach.

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To Islamic historians, the chronicles of Muslim empire represent a model of shining religious zeal and selfless exertion in the cause of Allah. Many Western historians, for their part, have been inclined to marvel at the perceived sophistication and tolerance of Islamic rule, praising the caliphs' cultivation of the arts and sciences and their apparent willingness to accommodate ethnic and religious minorities. There is some truth in both views, but neither captures the deeper and often more callous impulses at work in the expanding *umma* set in motion by Muhammad. For successive generations of Islamic rulers, imperial dominion was dictated not by universalistic religious principles but by their prophet's vision of conquest and his summons to fight and subjugate unbelievers.

That the worldly aims of Islam might conflict with its moral and spiritual demands was evident from the start of the caliphate. Though the Umayyad monarchs portrayed their constant wars of expansion as "jihad in the path of Allah," this was largely a façade, concealing an increasingly secular and absolutist rule. Lax in their attitude toward Islamic practices and mores, they were said to have set aside special days for drinking alcohol—specifically forbidden by the prophet—and showed little inhibition about appearing nude before their boon companions and female singers.

The coup staged by the Abbasids in 747-49 was intended to restore Islam's true ways and undo the godless practices of their predecessors; but they too, like the Umayyads, were first and foremost imperial monarchs. For the Abbasids, Islam was a means to consolidating their jurisdiction and enjoying the fruits of conquest. They complied with the stipulations of the nascent religious law (*shari'a*) only to the extent that it served their needs, and indulged in the same vices—wine, singing girls, and sexual license—that had ruined the reputation of the Umayyads.

Of particular importance to the Abbasids was material splendor. On the occasion of his nephew's coronation as the first Abbasid caliph, Dawud ibn Ali had proclaimed, "We did not rebel in order to grow rich in silver and in gold." Yet it was precisely the ever-increasing pomp of the royal court that would underpin Abbasid prestige. The gem-studded dishes of the caliph's table, the gilded curtains of the palace, the golden tree and ruby-eyed golden elephant that adorned the royal courtyard were a few of the opulent possessions that bore witness to this extravagance.

The riches of the empire, moreover, were concentrated in the hands of the few at the expense of the many. While the caliph might bestow thousands of dirhams on a favorite poet for reciting a few lines, ordinary laborers in Baghdad carried home a dirham or two a month. As for the empire's more distant subjects, the caliphs showed little interest in their conversion to the faith, preferring instead to colonize their lands and expropriate their wealth and labor. Not until the third Islamic century did the bulk of these populations embrace the religion of their imperial masters, and this was a process emanating from below—an effort by non-Arabs to escape paying tribute and to remove social barriers to their advancement. To make matters worse, the metropolis plundered the resources of the provinces, a practice inaugurated at the time of Muhammad and reaching its apogee under the Abbasids. Combined with the government's weakening control of the periphery, this shameless exploitation triggered numerous rebellions throughout the empire.

Tension between the center and the periphery was, indeed, to become the hallmark of Islam's imperial experience. Even in its early days, under the Umayyads, the empire was hopelessly overextended, largely because of inadequate means of communication and control. Under the Abbasids, a growing number of provinces fell under the sway of local dynasties. With no effective metropolis, the empire was reduced to an agglomeration of entities united only by the overarching factors of language and religion. Though the Ottomans temporarily reversed the trend, their own imperial ambitions were likewise eventually thwarted by internal fragmentation.

In the long history of Islamic empire, the wide gap between delusions of grandeur and the centrifugal forces of localism would be bridged time and again by force of arms, making violence a key element of Islamic political culture. No sooner had Muhammad died than his successor, Abu Bakr, had to suppress a widespread revolt among the Arabian tribes. Twenty-three years later, the head of the *umma*, the caliph Uthman ibn Affan, was murdered by disgruntled rebels; his successor, Ali ibn Abi Talib, was confronted for most of his reign with armed insurrections, most notably by the governor of Syria, Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufian, who went on to establish the Umayyad dynasty after Ali's assassination. Mu'awiya's successors managed to hang on to power mainly by relying on physical force, and were consumed for most of their reign with preventing or quelling revolts in the diverse corners of

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their empire. The same was true for the Abbasids during the long centuries of their sovereignty.

Western academics often hold up the Ottoman empire as an exception to this earlier pattern. In fact the caliphate did deal relatively gently with its vast non-Muslim subject populations—provided that they acquiesced in their legal and institutional inferiority in the Islamic order of things. When these groups dared to question their subordinate status, however, let alone attempt to break free from the Ottoman yoke, they were viciously put down. In the century or so between Napoleon's conquests in the Middle East and World War I, the Ottomans embarked on an orgy of bloodletting in response to the nationalist aspirations of their European subjects. The Greek war of independence of the 1820's, the Danubian uprisings of 1848 and the attendant Crimean war, the Balkan explosion of the 1870's, the Greco-Ottoman war of 1897—all were painful reminders of the costs of resisting Islamic imperial rule.

Nor was such violence confined to Ottoman Europe. Turkey's Afro-Asiatic provinces, though far less infected with the nationalist virus, were also scenes of mayhem and destruction. The Ottoman army or its surrogates brought force to bear against Wahhabi uprisings in Mesopotamia and the Levant in the early 19th century, against civil strife in Lebanon in the 1840's (culminating in the 1860 massacres in Mount Lebanon and Damascus), and against a string of Kurdish rebellions. In response to the national awakening of the Armenians in the 1890's, Constantinople killed tens of thousands—a taste of the horrors that lay ahead for the Armenians during World War I.

THE LEGACY of this imperial experience is not difficult to discern in today's Islamic world. Physical force has remained the main if not the sole instrument of political discourse in the Middle East. Throughout the region, absolute leaders still supersede political institutions, and citizenship is largely synonymous with submission; power is often concentrated in the hands of small, oppressive minorities; religious, ethnic, and tribal conflicts abound; and the overriding preoccupation of sovereigns is with their own survival.

At the domestic level, these circumstances have resulted in the world's most illiberal polities. Political dissent is dealt with by repression, and ethnic and religious differences are settled by internecine strife and murder. One need only mention, among many instances, Syria's massacre of 20,000 of its Muslim activists in the early 1980's, or the brutal treatment of Iraq's Shiite and Kurdish communities until the 2003 war, or the genocidal campaign now being conducted in Darfur by the government of Sudan and its allied militias. As for foreign policy in the Middle East, it too has been pursued by means of crude force, ranging from terrorism and subversion to outright aggression, with examples too numerous and familiar to cite.

Reinforcing these habits is the fact that, to this day, Islam has retained its imperial ambitions. The last great Muslim empire may have been destroyed and the caliphate left vacant, but the dream of regional and world domination has remained very much alive. Even the ostensibly secular doctrine of pan-Arabism has been effectively Islamic in its ethos, worldview, and imperialist vision. In the words of Nuri Said, longtime prime minister of Iraq and a prominent early champion of this doctrine: "Although Arabs are naturally attached to their native land, their nationalism is not confined by boundaries. It is an aspiration to restore the great tolerant civilization of the early caliphate."

That this "great tolerant civilization" reached well beyond today's Middle East is not lost on those who hope for its restoration. Like the leaders of al Qaeda, many Muslims and Arabs unabashedly pine for the reconquest of Spain and consider their 1492 expulsion from the country a grave historical injustice waiting to be undone. Indeed, as immigration and higher rates of childbirth have greatly increased the number of Muslims within Europe itself over the past several decades, countries that were never ruled by the caliphate have become targets of Muslim imperial ambition. Since the late 1980's, Islamists have looked upon the growing population of French Muslims as proof that France, too, has become a part of the House of Islam. In Britain, even the more moderate elements of the Muslim community are candid in setting out their aims. As the late Zaki Badawi, a doyen of interfaith dialogue in the UK, put it, "Islam is a universal religion. It aims to bring its message to all corners of the earth. It hopes that one day the whole of humanity will be one Muslim community."

WHETHER IN its militant or its more benign version, this world-conquering agenda continues to meet with condescension and denial on the part of many educated Westerners. To intellectuals, foreign-policy experts, and politicians alike, "empire" and "imperialism" are categories that apply exclusively to the European powers and, more recently, to the United States. In this view of things, Muslims, whether in the Middle East or

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elsewhere, are merely objects—the long-suffering victims of the aggressive encroachments of others. Lacking an internal, autonomous dynamic of its own, their history is rather a function of their unhappy interaction with the West, whose obligation it is to make amends. This perspective dominated the widespread explanation of the 9/11 attacks as only a response to America's (allegedly) arrogant and self-serving foreign policy, particularly with respect to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

As we have seen, however, Islamic history has been anything but reactive. From Muhammad to the Ottomans, the story of Islam has been the story of the rise and fall of an often astonishing imperial aggressiveness and, no less important, of never quiescent imperial dreams. Even as these dreams have repeatedly frustrated any possibility for the peaceful social and political development of the Arab-Muslim world, they have given rise to no less repeated fantasies of revenge and restoration and to murderous efforts to transform fantasy into fact. If, today, America is reviled in the Muslim world, it is not because of its specific policies but because, as the preeminent world power, it blocks the final realization of this same age-old dream of regaining, in Zawahiri's words, the "lost glory" of the caliphate.

Nor is the vision confined to a tiny extremist fringe. This we saw in the overwhelming support for the 9/11 attacks throughout the Arab and Islamic worlds, in the admiring evocations of bin Laden's murderous acts during the crisis over the Danish cartoons, and in such recent findings as the poll indicating significant reservoirs of sympathy among Muslims in Britain for the "feelings and motives" of the suicide bombers who attacked London last July. In the historical imagination of many Muslims and Arabs, bin Laden represents nothing short of the new incarnation of Saladin, defeater of the Crusaders and conqueror of Jerusalem. In this sense, the House of Islam's war for world mastery is a traditional, indeed venerable, quest that is far from over.

To the contrary, now that this war has itself met with a so far determined counterattack by the United States and others, and with a Western intervention in the heart of the House of Islam, it has escalated to a new stage of virulence. In many Middle Eastern countries, Islamist movements, and movements appealing to traditionalist Muslims, are now jockeying fiercely for positions of power, both against the Americans and against secular parties. For the Islamists, the stakes are very high indeed, for if the political elites of the Middle East and elsewhere were ever to reconcile themselves to the reality that there is no Arab or Islamic "nation," but only modern Muslim states with destinies and domestic responsibilities of their own, the imperialist dream would die.

It is in recognition of this state of affairs that Zawahiri wrote his now famous letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the head of al Qaeda in Iraq, in July 2005. If, Zawahiri instructed his lieutenant, al Qaeda's strategy for Iraq and elsewhere were to succeed, it would have to take into account the growing thirst among many Arabs for democracy and a normal life, and strive not to alienate popular opinion through such polarizing deeds as suicide attacks on fellow Muslims. Only by harnessing popular support, Zawahiri concluded, would it be possible to come to power by means of democracy itself, thereby to establish jihadist rule in Iraq, and then to move onward to conquer still larger and more distant realms and impose the writ of Islam far and wide.

Something of the same logic clearly underlies the carefully plotted rise of Hamas in the Palestinian Authority, the (temporarily thwarted) attempt by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt to exploit the demand for free elections there, and the accession of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Iran. Indeed, as reported by Mark MacKinnon in the *Toronto Globe & Mail*, some analysts now see a new "axis of Islam" arising in the Middle East, uniting Hizballah, Hamas, Iran, Syria, the Muslim Brotherhood, elements of Iraq's Shiites, and others in an anti-American, anti-Israel alliance backed by Russia.

Whether or not any such structure exists or can be forged, the fact is that the fuel of Islamic imperialism remains as volatile as ever, and is very far from having burned itself out. To deny its force is the height of folly, and to imagine that it can be appeased or deflected is to play into its hands. Only when it is defeated, and when the faith of Islam is no longer a tool of Islamic political ambition, will the inhabitants of Muslim lands, and the rest of the world, be able to look forward to a future less burdened by Saladins and their gory dreams.

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The Friedan Mystique

Dan Seligman

Betty Friedan was a contentious and controversial figure during her forty-odd years onstage in the feminism wars, but the newspaper obituaries upon her death in February were remarkably uniform. Just about all of them began on page one, treated Friedan as a major historical figure, and posited that her first big book, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), was one of the century's salient intellectual events. The *Washington Post* said it had enabled the author to launch the feminist movement "almost single-handedly." According to the *New York Times*, not only did the book offer an "impassioned yet clear-eyed analysis of the issues that affected women's lives," but readers today would find it "as mesmerizing as it was more than four decades ago." The *Los Angeles Times* obituary was even more lyrical: "Melding sociology and humanistic psychology, the book became the cornerstone of one of the 20th century's most profound movements, unleashing the first full flowering of American feminism since the mid-1800's."

A story often told by and about Betty Friedan is that in the decades after *The Feminine Mystique*, which sold around 3 million copies in the United States alone, women repeatedly came up to her on the street and gushed, "You changed my life!" It is hard to evaluate the literal truth of this tale, but there is no doubt that the many commentators who cited it after her death were collectively endorsing the underlying thought—namely, that their subject had in fact made a huge and beneficial difference in the lives of American women. The *Times* obituary put it this way: "Though in later years, some feminists dismissed Ms. Friedan's work as outmoded, a great many aspects of modern life that seem routine today—from unisex Help Wanted ads to women in politics, medicine, the clergy, and the military—are the direct results of the hard-won advances she helped women attain."

Two propositions have thus been laid on the table: that *The Feminine Mystique* is one of the great books of our time, and that Betty Friedan personally bettered the lives of American women. Both seem highly problematic.

I recently read *The Feminine Mystique* for the first time, and did not find it lyrical or persuasive, much less mesmerizing. The writing is invincibly clunky, the reasoning recurrently wobbly. The book's argument is presented in fourteen chapters, each endeavoring to make some particular point about the hapless condition of women in America. The first opens with this famous lament:

> The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the 20th century in the United States. Each suburban housewife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut-butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—"Is this all?"

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The picture grows darker as the book's argument unfolds. A chapter titled "The Crisis in Woman's Identity" complains about the social conditioning that brainwashes women into thinking the housewife's role is actually important and fulfilling. A chapter on Freud identifies him as the intellectual founder of the idea that the woman is "inferior, childish, helpless, with no possibility of happiness unless she adjusted to being man's passive object." A chapter on women's colleges berates them for failing to exalt the life of the mind, out of fear that this might interfere with the students' ability to play their assigned roles as helpmates. In passing, the same chapter also argues that sexually segregated colleges are no less morally offensive than racially segregated colleges. A chapter toward the end of the book characterizes the housewife's lot as a "comfortable concentration camp." (Friedan later expressed regret about this last phrase.)

A major problem with the book's logic is the mismatch between its narrowly circumscribed content and its sweeping conclusions. The conclusions call for large changes in the country's basic arrangements: "It would be necessary to change the rules of the game to restructure professions, marriage, the family, the home." Yet the book's complaint about existing arrangements seems applicable only to a relatively small subset of the female population. The world described in the book's 400 pages is populated more or less exclusively by upscale, college-educated women raising families in comfortable suburban homes in the 1950's. This was Betty Friedan's own world—she and her husband lived in a suburb of New York City—but it was plainly a thin and unrepresentative slice of the national female experience.

On the measures ordinarily cited to gauge a group's well-being—its freedom, income, status, family situation—the women in this world would appear to have ranked at least one standard deviation above any female population during all of prior human history. The message of *The Feminine Mystique* is that these privileged women were nevertheless profoundly disturbed. They suffered from "the problem that has no name," a phrase the author invokes endlessly all through the book, possibly to remind the reader that she herself had discovered this strange malady ("Even the psychoanalysts have no name for it") or possibly to avoid anything so prosaic as a crisp definition.

In some contexts, the no-name problem seems to mean merely a lack of intellectual "fulfillment" in the homemaker role. But sometimes Friedan seems to be claiming that being a housewife can literally drive a woman crazy. She quotes a doctor who says, "You'd be surprised at the number of these happy suburban housewives who simply go berserk one night and run shrieking through the street without any clothes on." Elsewhere, acknowledging that many women seem perfectly happy as mothers and homemakers, she warns darkly: "Happiness is not the same thing as the aliveness of being fully used." She alleges portentously that being sentenced to housewifery is tantamount to being deprived of one's "personhood"—"forbidden to join men in the world, can women be people?"

In addition to being vague about the nature of the no-name problem, *The Feminine Mystique* is maddeningly elusive about the evidence for its existence. Friedan tells the reader that her project began in 1957, when she mailed a questionnaire to her Smith College classmates on the 15th anniversary of their graduation. It was the responses to this questionnaire, she writes, that led her to see women as oppressed and unhappy. Surveys conducted by others, she adds, drew similar responses from graduates of Radcliffe, Mount Holyoke, and other elite women's colleges. Over a span of several years, she also claims to have interviewed many other women, psychologists, and marriage counselors, who presumably sustained the original story line.

But the details of this allegedly massive research effort are obscure. It seems never to have occurred to Friedan that revolutionary findings based largely on survey research are inherently suspect, requiring the researcher to document precisely how the findings were produced. But Friedan never published the questionnaires, described only a few of the questions, and leaves us in the dark about the proportion of respondents that could be categorized as suffering from "the problem that has no name." (The closest she gets is in the risible statement that 60 percent of her Smith classmates "could not honestly say" they found homemaking to be "totally fulfilling.") The book features an avalanche of quotations from anonymous sources, innumerable anecdotes—and very few hard data.

Along the way, it also features a fair number of glimpses of Betty Friedan herself. We learn that she graduated summa cum laude from Smith, that she was offered and accepted a one-year postgraduate fellowship in psychology at a California college (unnamed), and that she turned down an offer to renew the fellowship for a second year. We also learn that, at some point in her post-college career, she was a newspaper reporter. She tells us nothing at all about her political orientation in these years, but the fact is that she was an admirer of Stalin's USSR: the newspaper (also unnamed in the book) was the *UE News*, published by the United Electrical Workers, a union later expelled from the CIO for its Communist leadership. Nor does she mention that in 1948 she attended the founding convention of the Communist-dominated Progressive party. Whether she was ever a

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member of the Communist party itself is not entirely clear. In any case she gradually drifted away from its orbit, finally coming to rest as a standard Left-liberal Democrat.

Finally, we learn from *The Feminine Mystique* that her own marriage was a shambles. This brings us to an inescapable question: whether the unhappiness Friedan purported to find among affluent suburban women was somehow reflecting her own wretched situation. In principle, of course, a book's findings should be judged on the evidence put forward by its author and not by details of the author's life. In principle, the problem that has no name could have been discovered by a suburban housewife who thought her own life was marvelous. But when an author is passionately committed to sensational new ideas for which the evidence is shaky, it is impossible to avoid suspicions about her own problems and predispositions.

And there is no doubt that Betty Friedan's marriage to Carl Friedman, with whom she had three children, was a disaster. (Soon after their marriage, he dropped the "m" from their name.) They were divorced in 1969, and for many years afterward she said that he had beaten her, to which he responded that he was just trying to defend himself from her physical assaults.

Clearly lacking a touch of class, Carl spent his final years running a website that viciously attacked his ex-wife, not omitting intimate sexual details from their marriage. But he seems to have been right about the beatings. Commenting on the years before their breakup, Betty noted in *The Feminine Mystique*'s epilogue:

> The anger I had not dared to face in myself during all the years I tried to play the helpless little housewife with my husband—and feeling more helpless the longer I played it—was beginning to erupt now, more and more violently.

ODDLY ENOUGH, Friedan appears to have been under the impression that her best-seller abounded in hard data. In the epilogue, she presents a pitiable tale of her efforts, while the book was still at the printer, to get a doctorate in social psychology from Columbia University. It seems that the department head patronized and discouraged her:

> He was very tolerant and kind, but surely, at forty-two, after all those undisciplined years as a housewife, I must understand that I wouldn't be able to meet the rigors of full-time graduate study for a Ph.D. and the mastery of statistics that was required. "But I used statistics throughout the book," I pointed out. . . . He looked blank. "Well, my dear," he said, "what do you want to bother your head getting a Ph.D. for, anyhow?"

My own experience with *The Feminine Mystique* is that statistics are seldom put in play, and when the author attempts to use hard data, she is more than likely to botch the job. In a discussion of women who marry too soon, she states: "Today the American population explosion comes in large part from teenage marriages." In fact, births to women under twenty never exceeded 14 percent of the total. She says that in the early 1960's the average age of marriage was in the teens. In fact, the median age never fell below twenty. Citing no particular source or date or locale, she writes that juvenile-delinquency rates in the bedroom suburbs were becoming "just as high as those in the city slums."

The book suffers from an avalanche of what might be called junk data: reports, overwhelmingly from popular women's magazines, purporting to cast light on the everyday problems—fatigue, boredom, bad news from the bathroom scale—of ordinary middle-class women. The sources most frequently cited in *The Feminine Mystique* are *Redbook*, *McCall's*, and the *Ladies' Home Journal*.

Of course, even if *The Feminine Mystique* is rated a dreadful book, there remains the possibility that its author did a great deal for American women. This view will seem intuitively plausible to anybody who believes that feminism itself did a great deal for them. There is certainly no doubt that Betty Friedan was one of, arguably the most important of, the movement's "founding mothers" (to quote again from the many obituaries). Possessed of boundless energy, an instinct for leadership, and self-confidence verging on arrogance, if not megalomania—even the most fawning obituaries felt obliged to mention her dictatorial impulses—she seemed always to be out front during the formative years. In 1966 she was the main founder of the National Organization for Women (NOW), and in the 1970's played significant roles in creating the National Women's Political Caucus (slogan: Make Policy, Not Coffee) and the National Abortion Rights Action League. And the evidence suggests that, despite its flaws, *The Feminine Mystique* did succeed in articulating the grievances of a certain class of American women while simultaneously packaging an ideology for the nascent movement.

Well, what did feminism do for American women? Many people would argue that it had at least one important and incontestable achievement: the opening-up of broad new career opportunities for women, and especially for those with a claim to intelligence and education, like many of the suburban homemakers described in *The Feminine Mystique*. But this argument needs to be seriously qualified.

During the years in which the movement was taking shape, something else was happening: an explo-

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sion in the number of educated women: the number of female college graduates in America more than tripled (to around 5 million) from 1940 to 1970. It is inconceivable that this swelling supply could have long existed without creating its own demand in the labor markets. With or without a feminist movement, educated women would have seen opportunities opening up. Indeed, it is fascinating to speculate on a counterfactual scenario wherein they would have received their opportunities without the unpleasant side-effects of movement feminism: without sexual warfare, affirmative action, boundless litigation, and maybe even without the raging political correctness that would make it increasingly troublesome, even for a president of Harvard, to mention the possibility of innate differences between men and women.

A difficulty for anyone who wants to believe in Betty Friedan and also in the feminist movement is that she herself became a critic of it. During the 1970's, she was increasingly unhappy with its emphasis on lesbian concerns and obsessive anti-male rhetoric. In 1981, she produced *The Second Stage*, a book intended to bring feminism back to its senses—to reestablish its relevance for heterosexual women who expected to marry and have children. Referring to women's "femininity," she complained in the opening chapter: "We blush even to use that word now." Her new position brought on breaks with other feminist icons, including Bella Abzug and Gloria Steinem.

But *The Second Stage* did not have the resonance of *The Feminine Mystique*, and utterly failed in its effort to force the movement back on track. Part of the problem here was that even while disagreeing with the movement's radicals, she shared many of their basic assumptions. Like them, Friedan assumed that the women's movement must always be on the Left. Like them, she took it as axiomatic that, aside from certain reproductive differences, men and women were indistinguishable. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Jimmy Carter began talking about a military draft and indicated that such a draft would include women; quite a few women proved unthrilled by the prospect, and *The Second Stage*, which appears to have been written at about this time, registers concern about such women. They are said to be demanding equal rights while failing to accept equal responsibility.

Another difficulty with the book is a major muddle about the meaning of "the second stage." Right off the bat, the reader is hit with many different and conflicting formulations, some verging on the eschatological, about exactly what will happen when we finally arrive there. One daring thought: "The second stage may not even be a women's movement. Men may be on the cutting edge of the second stage."

It didn't exactly work out that way. The real second stage featured the perceptible decline and collapse of a feminist movement presided over entirely by females. Nobody today cares much what NOW says or does. It could not conceivably produce 100,000 women to march down New York's Fifth Avenue, as it did in its glory days in the early 1970's. Its flagship magazine, *Ms.*, which once had a circulation of 300,000, still exists as a quarterly, but you will have trouble finding it on newsstands.

As argued in the obituaries, some part of the movement's decline reflects its past victories. Abortion, equal pay, equal opportunity in college sports, no "Men Wanted" ads in the papers, no mistletoe at office Christmas parties—virtually all the demands have been met. Feminism's only real defeat was the Equal Rights Amendment, which Friedan and NOW and battalions of liberal politicians identified as a sacred cause, indispensable to the well-being of the country's women—but which sank like a stone after its ratification finally failed in 1982. It might still be revived if only its supporters could explain why, in a country where women have the vote, and constitute a majority of the voters, we need to amend the Constitution so as to secure their rights. Pending an answer to that question, the movement would appear to lack any coherent agenda.

But even this may not be the largest obstacle it faces. The crusher is that it has managed, over the years, to alienate millions of young women. Here a central problem, dating back to the 70's, has involved what Betty Friedan then characterized as the Lavender Menace—the creeping identification of the women's movement with lesbianism. NOW's own formulation is that it defends the rights of all women, but it has long been obvious that lesbians, who comprise perhaps 4 percent of American women, are wildly overrepresented in the movement's leadership. A defining moment was the 1991 announcement by Patricia Ireland, a married woman who had just been elected president of NOW, that she would henceforth be spending much of her time with a female companion. She went on to serve ten years as president of the organization, which sponsored a Lesbian Rights Summit at a Capitol Hill hotel in 1999.

For an organization nominally representing women in general, the alliance with lesbianism would appear to be thoroughly irrational—and yet not entirely crazy. Once the economic victories had been won, and it became increasingly difficult to find new issues with broad-based appeal, a case could be made that the movement's best bet was to settle for a niche market. Just now, with the arrival of same-sex marriage as a hot issue, the lesbian market looks lively. NOW appears passionately committed to this cause, for which it has crusaded since 1995.

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A final obstacle to the resurrection of the women's movement is that Americans have been gradually discovering that its core proposition is false. In the 1960's and 70's, it was still possible for an educated person to believe that the observable differences in male and female behavior reflected only social conditioning—that, as Betty Friedan put it in *The Feminine Mystique*, women "happen to be the people who give birth," and nothing much follows from that. But in the 1980's, even some feminist scholars, notably Carol Gilligan of Harvard, were finding "natural" differences in the moral and psychological tendencies of the two sexes.

Since then, evolutionary research has dealt successive hammer blows to the "social conditioning" perspective. The logic of Darwinian sexual selection has always required substantial differences in male and female behavior, and in recent years evolutionary biologists have been busy filling in the details. In *Male, Female* (1998), for example, David Geary of the University of Missouri elaborates a range of biologically based sex differences in academic skills, predisposition to violence, accidental death and injury rates, incidence of anxiety and depression, eating disorders, occupational interests, and occupational achievement.

THE NEWS that men and women really are different, just as your grandmother assumed, need not change much civilized behavior. It need not affect the rules about equal opportunity in the job markets or in college admissions. It might, however, affect the laws pertaining to such matters, for instance by making it harder to adduce different success rates as prima-facie evidence of discrimination.

And the news might ultimately have a larger effect as well. Leon Kass, who retired in December as chairman of the President's Council on Bioethics, wrote an essay a few years ago on, of all things, the decline of courtship—a phenomenon he blames largely on the feminist movement and the equal-treatment rules it has always demanded. One passage from the essay is worth quoting at length:

> On the one side, there is a rise in female assertiveness and efforts at empowerment, with a consequent need to deny all womanly dependence and the kind of vulnerability that calls for the protection of strong and loving men, protection such men were once—and would still be—willing to provide. On the other side, we see the enfeeblement of men who, contrary to the dominant ideology, are not likely to become better lovers, husbands, or fathers if they too become feminists or fellow-travelers. On the contrary, many men now cynically exploit women's demands for equal power by letting them look after themselves—pay their own way, hold their own doors, fight their own battles, travel after dark by themselves. These ever so sensitive males will defend not a woman's honor but her right to learn the manly art of self-defense. In the present climate, those increasingly rare men who are still inclined to be gentlemen must dissemble their generosity as submissiveness.

Betty Friedan and her successors, then, really did change women's lives, one way or another. It would be pleasant and perhaps not altogether surprising to discover that, in their private lives, even many of those now loudly celebrating her legacy have been quietly working to undo its most injurious effects.

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Why Jews Laugh at Themselves

Hillel Halkin

A YEAR OR two ago I was told a joke by a friend who had heard it from a friend of his, an Orthodox Jew, who in turn had heard it from an ultra-Orthodox Jew. It had to do with the biblical injunction, "Thou shalt not boil a kid in its mother's milk," from which the ancient rabbis derived the prohibition against mixing meat with dairy in any form.

Moses, the joke goes, while copying down these words from God's mouth on Mount Sinai, looks up and says: "Lord, you obviously wouldn't be bothering us with a law that's just about baby goats. You must mean that we shouldn't eat any kosher animal at all that's boiled in its mother's milk."

"Well," God says, "all I told you was: 'Thou shalt not boil a kid in its mother's milk.'"

"But how often do we eat animals boiled in their mother's milk?" Moses continues to muse aloud. "There must be more to it than that. . . . I've got it! We're not supposed to eat meat with milk in general."

"Moses," God says, "just write down what I said: 'Thou shalt not boil a kid in its mother's milk.'"

"But what's the difference between milk and milk *products*, like butter or cheese?" Moses goes on reasoning. "And if we're not supposed to eat meat with butter, surely we shouldn't be cutting it with a knife that's been used for butter, either."

"Look, Moses," God says, "we have only 40 days on this mountain. Do whatever the f— you want and let's move on to the next law."

This, told by a Jewish fundamentalist! One wonders which is stranger: a religion like Islam, whose believers riot around the world because a newspaper pokes fun at their prophet, or a religion like Judaism, whose believers poke fun at their prophet themselves?

And yet the second religion may owe something of its peculiar sense of humor to the first. The Jewish joke, it can be argued, begins with the Qur'an.

WHAT MAKES a joke "Jewish" anyway? It certainly isn't the mere fact of Jews either telling it or being the butt of it. Take the supposed Jewish jokes I am regularly sent by an unsolicited e-mail source. Recently, I received a page of them on the subject of "What If Famous People Had Jewish Mothers." Typical was one that went: "Mona Lisa's Jewish mother: 'This you call a smile? After all the money your father and I spent on braces?'" This is a joke about Jews, and in all likelihood it was made up by Jews, but however intrinsically Jewish its mother may be, its humor is not.

Freud, who liked a good Jewish joke himself and whose *Wit and the Unconscious* invariably forms a

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part of any discussion of Jewish humor, had some perceptive things to say about it. Here is one of them:

> They [Jewish jokes] are stories invented by Jews and aimed at Jewish characteristics. The jokes made about Jews by outsiders are mostly brutal comic anecdotes in which . . . the Jew counts as a comical figure. The Jewish jokes originating with Jews admit this too, but although they show an awareness of [Jews'] real faults, they also know how these are related to their good points; and the share the raconteur's own person has in what is being criticized creates the subjective conditions for the joke-work that are otherwise difficult to set up. By the way, I do not know whether it often happens in other instances that a people should make fun of its own nature to such an extent.

According to Freud, then, a classical Jewish joke is one in which:

1) The primary thrust of the humor is directed not, as in most jokes, aggressively or mockingly against the Other but rather against one's own group, that is, against the Jews themselves. Moreover, such a joke is truly Jewish only when its Jewish teller identifies with this group. If mechanically repeated by a Gentile or an assimilated Jew, it would no longer be the same joke.

2) At the same time, there is in the self-denigration of this humor a dialectical element of self-praise, which works in the opposite direction. That is why Jewish-mother jokes, which are little more than "brutal comic anecdotes" aimed at women with no redeeming qualities, and whom the joke teller does not acknowledge as his kith and kin, fail to constitute such humor.

ONE OF the jokes related by Freud in *Wit and the Unconscious* illustrates the difference between a Jewish and a non-Jewish joke particularly well—because in it, Freud or somebody else before him has turned a Jewish joke, by means of a minor alteration, into a non-Jewish one. Here is Freud's version:

> A doctor, having come to deliver the baby of a Baroness, pronounced after examining her that the moment had not come and suggested to the Baron that they in the meantime enjoy a game of cards in the next room. After a while a cry of pain from the Baroness struck the ears of the two men: "*Ah, mon Dieu, mon Dieu, que je souffre!*" The Baron sprang up, but the doctor signaled to him to sit down: "It's nothing. Let's go on with our game!" A little later there were again cries from the pregnant woman: "*Mein Gott, Mein Gott, welche schreckliche Schmerzen!*" "Aren't you going in to her, Doctor?" asked the Baron. "No, no, it's not time yet." At last there came from next door an unmistakable scream of "Ayy, ayy, ayy!" The doctor threw down his cards and exclaimed: "*Now* it's time."

There is indeed nothing discernibly Jewish about the joke in this form. Yet in another version, which is almost certainly the original one, the Baroness does not cry "Ayy! Ayy!" but rather, in Yiddish, "*Gottenyu! Gottenyu!*"—"Dear God! Dear God!" This makes a great difference. In Freud's mildly misogynist telling, the punch line informs us that as long as the Baroness is sufficiently in control of herself to speak, her labor pains cannot be serious; only when she emits an animal scream does the doctor know she's about to give birth. In the Jewish original, on the other hand, the Baroness is not a true aristocrat at all but rather an East European Jew and native Yiddish speaker who has been passing herself off as a French or German blueblood. As her pain gets worse, she involuntarily screams in her mother tongue, thus revealing to the doctor that her labor has reached its climax.

Even though in both cases the woman's true nature is exposed by pain, we are thus laughing at different things. In Freud's joke, it is at women, or at least at refined and cultivated women who, when push literally comes to shove, revert to their naturally primitive selves. In the Jewish joke, it is at Jews pretending to be Gentiles.

And there is something else that is different about the second version of this joke, namely, the hidden bond between the doctor and the woman. As related by Freud, the doctor is cleverer than the Baron because he knows more about women and human behavior. In the joke's Jewish variation, being a Jew the doctor also realizes from the moment he sees her that the "Baroness" is Jewish, and keeps this knowledge to himself.

At whom, then, is this joke really aimed? Is it only at the Jewish "Baroness," whose fraudulence has been exposed? Clearly, it is also at the Christian Baron, who has been dimwitted enough to be taken in by her. And alongside the two of them, the Jewish doctor, who refrains from revealing the Baroness's secret to the Baron, emerges as a wise and honorable figure.

Nor does Jewish humor need to relate to Jews explicitly; the implicit may be enough. Take the legendary Jack Benny skit in which Benny is accosted by an armed mugger who threatens, "Your money or your life." The comedian takes his time

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answering and, when prodded with a gun, protests: "I'm thinking. I'm thinking!" While he is not openly identified as a Jew, the two characteristics that he is being mocked for, love of money and over-intellectuality, are widely associated with Jews. So is the ambivalence of the humor. It is laughable, after all, to be so attached to the contents of one's wallet that one would be prepared to die for them, just as it is laughable to want to cogitate on the matter at gunpoint. Still, are we not also forced to admire the person who refuses to be rushed even by a threat to his life, and insists on his right to rational reflection? A stereotypical goy acts blindly; a stereotypical Jew thinks before acting.

In fact, Jewish humor does not even have to be implicitly about Jews. Groucho Marx's famous quip that he would never join a club whose standards were so low as to accept someone like himself, in which the clash of self-deprecation and self-esteem reaches the nth degree, could be attributed not only to a member of any minority group but to anyone at all who feels rejected by society. Although many Jewish jokes can be told only about Jews, most Jewish jokes have a universal aspect.

BUT WHERE does the Jewish joke come from? It has become customary to think of it as deeply rooted in the Jewish psyche, even part of the Jewish "instinct for self-preservation," as an editor of an anthology of such jokes has put it:

> By laughing at the absurdities and cruelties of life, Jews draw much of the sting from them. . . . What makes the Jew such an irrepressible jester? What gives so much of Jewish humor its ruefulness? The answer is: the Jews are a very ancient people, and they have navigated all the seven seas of misery since they became Pharaoh's bondsmen in Egypt.

The problem with this is that when we turn to Jewish texts, not only do we find nothing resembling a Jewish joke from the time of the Pharaohs but we find nothing anywhere in the Bible or, for that matter, in the Talmud, the Midrash, or later rabbinic literature. In these places, Jewish suffering and persecution are reacted to with grief, or anger at the enemy who caused them, or self-castigation or remorse for the sins that brought them on, or vindications of God's justice for meting them out, or even occasional questioning of that divine justice—but never with laughter.

This is not to say that one cannot find in such texts the attitudes or thought processes on which many Jewish jokes are based. Think of the well-known joke about the two Jews on a train in Russia, one of whom asks the other where he is going and, when told "to Minsk," replies: "What a liar you are! You say you're going to Minsk because you want me to think you're going to Pinsk, but I happen to know you're going to Minsk, so why not admit it?" But even though the joke mocks the Jewish penchant for intricate talmudic logic, that penchant is rarely mocked by the Talmud itself.*

Similarly, while linguistic word play is an intrinsic part of the rabbinic exegesis of Scripture, it does not in itself constitute Jewish humor in Freud's sense. There is, for example, a rare example of a documented joke from the 15th century, from the circle of the renowned Spanish rabbi Isaac Abuhav. Once, it is related, when Abuhav, who was blind in one eye, was out walking with three of his disciples, they sat on a rock to rest and a disciple said to him, "We are seven eyes on a rock," punning on the phrase "seven facets of a stone" from the prophet Zechariah. He could do this because in the biblical verse, the Hebrew word for "stone" can also mean "rock," the word for "of" can also mean "on," and the word for "facets" can also means "eyes." This is witty, but it is not a Jewish joke.

In fact, what Freud calls Jewish humor cannot be found in writing before the 19th century. It probably first occurs in literary form with the baptized Jew Heinrich Heine (whose many witticisms on the Jews include the remark that on the day Christians take to eating *tsholent*, the beloved Jewish Sabbath stew, every Jew will convert to Christianity), and it attains its full development in the great Yiddish writer Sholom Aleichem, of whom the Borscht Belt comedian is a distant descendant. By the end of the 19th century, the Jewish joke was so well known that Freud could assume it was familiar to all his readers.

But where was it hiding before this? Of course, jokes have oral histories of their own, and Jewish jokes are undoubtedly older than their literary manifestations; we know of a few made by 18th-century wedding jesters and rogue figures that have some of the flavor of the modern Jewish joke. And yet if such jokes went back much farther than

* As Rabbi Joseph Telushkin observes in his *Jewish Humor*, a few passages in the Talmud do jest about what can happen when talmudic logic is debased. For instance, there is the conundrum posed by the first-century Rabbi Yossi ben Taddai: "I am forbidden to marry my daughter, but my daughter's mother is permitted to me. All the more so, then, should I be forbidden to marry the daughter of someone who is forbidden to me. [Since] I am forbidden to marry somebody else's wife, I should be forbidden to marry the daughter of somebody else's wife. Therefore, all marriages should be forbidden."

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that, we would expect to find at least some written evidence of them—and we don't. The main form of written humor among Jews that we do find is something else. This brings us back to the Qur'an.

UNLIKE THE Christian New Testament, but like the Hebrew Bible, the Qur'an was considered by those who believed in it to be a divinely revealed document, which is to say quite literally God's word. As such, it was also regarded as a touchstone of literary excellence—so much so that it became a common practice among Muslim authors to embellish their work with scriptural quotations not only, as did their Christian counterparts, in religious writings and sermons but in purely secular prose and poetry as well.

This practice was called in Arabic *iqtibas*, which means, literally, lighting one coal or fire from another—that is, heightening the beauty of one's words with the greater beauty of God's. The skillful use of *iqtibas* was considered an art in itself, involving the choice and placement of verses from the Qur'an so that they would blend naturally with the passage into which they had been inserted and redound to its best benefit. Thus, the early Islamic poetess el-Khansa, a 7th-century contemporary of Muhammad's, took a verse from Sura 99 of the Qur'an, "When the earth is shaken with her shaking and brings forth her burdens," which refers to the wonders that will accompany the resurrection of the dead on Judgment Day, and transferred it to an elegy written for a deceased brother. Indicating the cosmic magnitude of his death for her, she wrote: "The high mountains fell down because of his loss, and the earth was shaken with her shaking."

There is nothing funny about this kind of *iqtibas*. But medieval Arabic literature includes much comic writing, too, and although it seemed blasphemous to most Muslim commentators, *iqtibas* came to be used for humorous purposes by turning Qur'anic verses into pointed *doubles entendres*. The Dutch scholar Geert van Gelder gives a striking example of such "forbidden firebrands," as he calls them, taken from Sura 78, in which Mohammed declares: "Truly, we warn you of a chastisement near at hand—the day when . . . the disbeliever will say: O would that I were dust!" Borrowing the end of this verse, the poet ibn al-Damamini put it into an epigram about some pious Muslims who had smashed a jug of prohibited wine. "They broke the jug and soaked the earth with wine," he wrote, "[and] I said . . . O would that I were dust." Obviously, ibn al-Damamini's motive for uttering this wish was not the same as that of Muhammad's terrified unbeliever.

Medieval Hebrew literature, a great deal of which was written by Jews living in Muslim lands, was heavily influenced by Arabic models. Not surprisingly, then, both ordinary *iqtibas*, known to modern Hebrew literary criticism as *shibbuts* or "insetting," and its comic variety are widespread in the Hebrew literature of this period, the sole difference being that the scriptural quotations come from the Hebrew Bible rather than from the Qur'an. Still on the subject of alcohol, for instance, the great 11th-century Hebrew poet Shmuel Hanagid has some lines in praise of wine in which he calls it "my portion and my cup," *menat helki ve-kosi*—words lifted from Psalm 16 where they appear in the verse, "The Lord is my portion and my cup." Any educated Hebrew reader of Hanagid's time, whether he smiled or frowned at such irreverence, would have recognized the "inset" immediately, just as any educated Muslim would have identified ibn al-Damamini's.

The comical *iqtibas* reached its peak in an Arabic genre that was once again borrowed by Hebrew writers—namely, the rhymed-prose narrative, known as *maqama*, that was highly popular in the Middle Ages. These works of fiction were lengthy, picaresque accounts that generally featured two main characters, an itinerant rogue and a narrator who relates the rogue's escapades. Here is a passage from one of the best-known Hebrew *maqamas*, Judah al-Harizi's 13th-century *Book of Takhkemoni*, in which the narrator relates how the rogue, angered by the tight-fisted Jews from whom he seeks to beg or swindle a livelihood, composes a mock epic about a great war between the King of Generosity and the King of Stinginess that is won by the latter with Jewish support. The rogue's description of the climactic battle of this war, which contains two scriptural "insets" from the book of Judges and one from Isaiah, goes as follows:*

> Now it came to pass at midday, that the troops of Generosity gave way, and the sons of Judah took sway. Shouting *Hurray! Hurray! Hurray!* they broke the lines of Generosity like flaxen cords; they chased their foe through hill and dale with waving swords; they battered them, scattered them, shattered them, then took the fords until the survivors, trembling slaves, buried themselves in the holes of rocks and in earthen caves.

The chapter ends with the narrator's summation,

* The translation is by David Segal in his *The Book of Takhkemoni* (2003). For a discussion of this work, see my article, "Out of Andalusia," in COMMENTARY, September 2003.

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which incorporates five scriptural citations; three are from the book of Lamentations, the biblical threnody for the Babylonians' sacking of Jerusalem:

> For this our hearts are faint and our eyes grow dim, for this our spirits melt, the cup of bitter overruns the brim—for the mountain of Generosity that is desolate, its sweet prince gone; foxes walk thereon. Oh, Lord, let our petition not be spurned: turn us unto Thee and we shall be turned. Raise high the horn of Generosity so long enslaved; in his day Judah shall be saved.

Here, the use of the "inset" has been expanded. No longer limited to an isolated jest as in ibn al-Damamini or Hanagid, it has taken on the character of a parody of Holy Writ—in this case, one in which Jewish penny-pinching is compared to the enemy that sacked Jerusalem. Jewish jokes about this subject do not begin with Jack Benny.

THE GENRE of the medieval Hebrew rhymed-prose narrative has many such passages, the humor of which comes from the burlesquing of religious tradition and its texts. Consider a 15th-century parable by a little-known Hebrew author named Matatyah in which an elderly Jew is told by Time that he will be comforted with a second wife, named Seyvah (Hebrew for "Gray Hair"), to replace his first wife, Ahavah ("Love"), who has left him. After a wedding scene that features a comical take-off on the *ketubah*, the Jewish marriage contract, comes a description of the couple's first night together. Here, the main source of "insets" is the Song of Songs, whose beautiful beloved is changed by Matatyah into an ugly crone. Where the Bible compares the shape of the beloved's forehead to the curve of a pomegranate (*rimon*), Matatyah makes this a maggot (*rima*), and the "scarlet thread" (*hut ha-shani*) of her lips becomes a "double pain" (*mehush ha-shanuy*).

There is more to this, however, than verbal slapstick. Read symbolically, Ahavah and Seyvah are the same woman, and Matatyah has written a biting commentary on what happens to romantic love, as depicted in the Song of Songs, during the course of a long marriage. The Bible represents an ideal world that is played off against the world as it is, with the contrast between life's expectations and its realities providing the deeper humor.

To the best of my knowledge, one does not find this sort of thing in the Arabic *maqama*. The comical *iqtibas*, the "forbidden firebrand," is irreverent but no more; it never goes so far as to suggest that the ideals of the Qur'an are incompatible with real life—or, to reverse the formulation, that real life falls comically short of the Qur'anic ideal.

Why did Jewish humor go beyond Arab humor in this respect? One reason is Jewish historical experience. The Qur'an promises the followers of Islam glory and dominion, and medieval Islam, which triumphantly expanded all over the world, fulfilled this promise handsomely. The Bible promises Israel the same—and Jews in the Middle Ages were everywhere a small and often downtrodden minority. If they learned to laugh at the same Scripture they fervently believed in, this was not only, as our anthologist has observed, to help them "navigate the seven seas of misery," but because contradiction, especially on a grand scale, is comic in itself.

In talking about the humor of the Hebrew rhymed-prose narrative, therefore, we need to distinguish between two different aspects of it. For the most part, this humor is no different from that of other peoples; stories and jokes about men who, to their dismay, find themselves unexpectedly in bed with ugly women are a feature of male humor everywhere. Yet from time to time, by virtue of "insetting," it becomes unique—and in doing so, it also becomes ambivalent; for the Hebrew reader who is forced by biblical citations to concede that God has let him down is at the same time reminded by them that he belongs to God's chosen, the proof being that only a Jew can understand such virtuoso games with God's Word.

Jewish joking about what was sacred to Jews was also longer-lived than the comic Arabic *iqtibas*. An increasingly conservative Muslim world eventually put an end to such blasphemies. Jews never did. On the contrary, their laughter at Judaism's expense only grew as it spread from Arab lands to Europe, where it also took the form of the "Purim Shpiel," a costumed spoof, performed once a year, of biblical stories. Traditional Hebrew rhymed-prose narratives themselves continued to be written well into the 19th century, one of the last notable ones being a delightful parody of Hasidism, replete with numerous scriptural "insets," by a Hungarian Jew named Yosef Chutzner.

Nor did Hasidism balk at telling such jokes about itself. One of the great rogue-jesters in Jewish folklore, Hershele Ostropolyer, was an authentic historical figure hired by the followers of Rabbi Boruch of Mezhibozh (1757-1810), the grandson of Hasidism's founder the Baal Shem Tov, to alleviate his depressive tendencies. It is told about the two of them:

Once, as was Rabbi Boruch's custom when

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stricken by an attack of melancholia, he withdrew to his room and refused to see anyone. Hershele put on the rabbi's clothes, sat in the rabbi's chair, and pretended to be Rabbi Boruch. After a while a woman appeared, having come to ask the rabbi to have pity on her daughter, all of whose pregnancies had ended in miscarriages.

"Go ask my wife," Hershele told her, "for a pair of my underpants and tell your daughter to smell them all through her pregnancy."

The woman did as she was told and her daughter gave birth to a healthy child. After Rabbi Boruch had recovered from his depression, he asked Hershele: "Where did you learn of such a remedy?"

"It's written in the Mishnah," said Hershele. "It says there, 'No woman ever miscarried from the smell of sacred flesh.'"

Hershele was quoting from *The Ethics of the Fathers*, which states that "ten miracles were granted to our forefathers in the Temple," the first being that "no women ever miscarried from the smell of sacred flesh"—that is, from the smell of the animals sacrificed and burned on the Temple's altar. Applied to Rabbi Boruch's underpants, this is a comic maneuver that can be traced back to el-Khansa's 7th-century elegiac *iqtibas* for her brother.

BUT LET'S return to Heine. He was also the first Jewish author to treat of the schlemiel, a figure emblematic of the modern Jewish joke as a whole. Schlemiel jokes, to cite Ruth R. Wisse's *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero* (1971), depend on "a balanced humor that cuts simultaneously into the character and into those belittling him." Schlemiels, Wisse remarks, though invariably "powerless and unlucky," are "psychologically, or, as one used to say, spiritually, the victors in defeat."

Heine was not the first European author to mention schlemiels. His contemporary Adelbert von Chamisso preceded him, publishing in 1814 a novel entitled *The Wonderful Story of Peter Schlemihl*. But while Chamisso picked up the word "schlemiel" from Jews, his Peter is a Gentile, one who sells his shadow to the devil only to discover that he cannot get along without it. Heine's schlemiels, on the other hand, are not only Jews, they are famous ones.

In 1851, impoverished and bedridden in Paris with his Christian wife, Heine published a volume of poems called *Romançero*, one section of which, "Hebrew Melodies," consisted of poems on Jewish themes. The longest of these is about the great medieval Spanish Hebrew poet and philosopher Yehuda Halevi, most of whose verse was lost until rediscovered by Jewish scholars in the 19th century.

Long before Heine's time, Halevi, the author of many poems of longing for Zion, had been made into a romantic Jewish legend by the mystery of his death. Leaving his home in Spain in the year 1140, a renowned figure in his sixties, he had set out on a long and dangerous journey to Palestine, then a war-torn battlefield between Crusaders and Muslims, determined to live his last years in the land he dreamed of all his life. Even today, when recent scholarship has greatly added to our knowledge of this journey, which first took him to Egypt, nothing is known of what happened to him once he reached the shores of Palestine. Although all historical traces of him then vanish, for centuries the story was told that he was trampled to death by a Muslim horseman as he knelt at Jerusalem's gates to kiss its dust.

The first part of Heine's "Jehuda ben Halevy," anecdotally meandering and digressive in typical Heine fashion, is a sweetly lyrical imagining of Halevi's life, from his childhood in Toledo to his death "*zu Fuessen seiner Liebsten*," at the feet of his beloved Jerusalem, "while his dying head lay cradled in her lap."* And yet just as the poem seems about to become hopelessly mawkish, it takes a new turn. "My own dear wife is most unhappy,/ With the chapters I have written," Heine tells us, and off he goes in a different direction. Grouping Halevi with two other leading Hebrew poets of the Spanish period, Solomon ibn Gabirol and Abraham ibn Ezra, he discourses on the latter's life as a homeless wanderer; laments the *Dichterschicksal*, the sad "poet's fate," of all three men; and concludes that, in their impractical attachment to the muse of poetry, they were all types of *der goettliche Schlemihl*, "the divine schlemiel."

And now we are treated to another digression, this time on the word *Schlemihl*. Not only does Heine feel that he owes his German readers an explanation of it, but its provenance has always puzzled him. And so on a visit to Berlin, he asks his knowledgeable friend, the Jewish lawyer Hitzig, about it and is told that it derives from the name of the minor biblical figure of Shelumiel ben Tsurishaddai. According to Hitzig, writes Heine:

In the Bible is the story
Of the wandering in the desert,
And how the men of Israel lusted
For the winsome girls of Canaan.

* Here and in what follows, the translations from Heine are my own.

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Thus it happened that one Pinhas,
Seeing that the highborn Zimri
Was consorting with a floozy
From a Canaanitish background,

Seized his spear and in a fury
Ran it through the aforesaid Zimri,
Stabbing him to death most neatly—
Or so at least the Bible tells us.

Yet through the multitude of Israel
Quickly spread the whispered rumor
That the intended victim, Zimri,
Was not the fellow speared by Pinhas—

Who, blinded by his sudden anger,
Went and murdered the wrong person,
A quite innocent bystander
Named Schlemihl ben Zuri Schadday.

And so it was that this poor devil
Was the father whose descendants
Are the schlemiels. . .

Both Shelumiel ben Tsurishaddai and the story of Pinhas and Zimri appear in the biblical book of Numbers but not in the same chapter, leading scholars to argue that this etymology of "schlemiel" is incorrect. They may well be right. Yet it can be demonstrated, I believe, that a version of the Pinhas story, in which Shelumiel ineptly gets in the way of a spear meant for Zimri, did exist among Jews. And it was with the help of such a parody of Scripture that Heine, ironically subverting the beginning of his own poem, suggests that the romantic poet of Zion was a schlemiel like Shelumiel, a hapless victim who gave up the good life in Spain to be killed by someone with nothing personal against him. A more practical pilgrim, presumably, would have had his head up, on the lookout for danger, rather than his face down in Jerusalem's dust

This comical deflating of the Halevi legend could serve as the basis for a routine by Mel Brooks or Woody Allen—the latter of whom might indeed have been thinking of Halevi's fate when he remarked, "I don't want to achieve immortality through my work, I want to achieve it by not dying." And yet, as Ruth Wisse observes, the same joke that ridicules the schlemiel vindicates him on the rebound. There is a sublimity in other-worldliness that no practicality can vie with.* In the poem's last part, Heine, who himself might have led a comfortable existence as an acclaimed German poet in his native land had not his political indiscreetness forced him into exile, makes his own identification with the "schlemiel" clear, changing direction once more:

The years come and the years go.
Three thousand of them have gone by
Since the death of our first father,
Herr Schlemihl ben Zuri Schadday.

Pinhas too is long since gone—
Yet his spear is still held fast,
And still we hear it as it whistles
Through the air above our heads.

The best hearts are those it strikes at,
Like Jehuda ben Halevy's,
Or like Moses ibn Ezra's,
Or like Solomon Gabirol's.

Or like Heinrich Heine's. Once, invalided in Paris, he told his friend Alfred Meissner of a visit from an old acquaintance, a German synagogue cantor, who to lift his spirits had sung to him "some of the old desert chants of Judea in all their original, traditional purity"—causing, he added drily, "our poodle Minko to crawl under the sofa and our parrot Cocotte to cling for dear life to the bars of her cage." Asked by his innocent French wife after the cantor had left, "Henri, what was that terrible music?," he then replied, "I'm sorry, my dear, the man was just singing a few of our German folk songs." And describing Jewish humor every bit as well as Freud did, Heine said to his friend: "You can see for yourself, my good Meissner, how in one and the same breath I mock the Jews and take their side. I can never decide if they seem to me more laughable than praiseworthy or the opposite."

HEINE'S "Jehuda ben Halevy" might be said to mark the point at which, in the person of the schlemiel, pre-modern Jewish parody of Scripture turns into modern Jewish humor.

Of course Moses, in the joke about meat and dairy with which we began, is no schlemiel. He is a nudnik, a nitpicker who doesn't know when to stop. The nudnik does not win, like the schlemiel, because of his weakness, but because he wears down the stronger party. Although God may think He is giving the Jews simple laws, the Jewish mind refuses to be thwarted. It craves complexity and will get it even if it has to exhaust God's patience. In fact, it is happiest when it has exhausted God's patience, because then it is on its own.

* As her final chapters make clear, Wisse's finely discriminating appreciation of the "schlemiel as modern hero" does not extend to an endorsement of the type as a cultural, let alone a political, model for Jews.

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Still, the principle is the same as that in the schlemiel joke. One mocks the nudnik—and takes his side.

Why does an ultra-Orthodox Jew enjoy such a joke so much that he tells it himself instead of demanding the scalp of the heretic (or perhaps of the fellow ultra-Orthodox Jew) who made it up? Maybe because it is not really so heretical. Jewish humor, as we conceive of it, may not go back very far in Jewish tradition, but a Judaism that builds elaborate structures on the bare foundations of biblical law certainly does. And so does an imperfect Moses. Frightened of the mission thrust on him and seeking to beg off as unworthy when first approached by God, the biblical Moses is quite capable of making mistakes and driving God to distraction while also sometimes prevailing on Him. The Bible never treats him as anything but fallible, which is how he thinks of himself ("now the man Moses was very humble above all the men on the face of the earth," we are told), and tradition, which has some remarkable legends about the Law's taking on a life of its own in the hands of its interpreters, is in agreement with this.

In Islam, on the other hand, Muhammad is the epitome of human perfection. "Your companion errs not, nor does he deviate," he says of himself in the Qur'an. About such a man and the revelation received by him, his followers do not joke.

One can speculate about who, ultimately, is the more secure in his religious faith: the believer who can laugh at his prophet or the one who cannot. But speculation aside, the historical fact is that the comic *iqtibas* that helped inspire modern Jewish humor was never accorded the same kind of legitimacy among Muslims. Although "forbidden firebrands" may have continued to lead a private or underground existence in the Islamic world long after their disappearance from permissible literary discourse, they were publicly repressed. We might be better off today if they hadn't been.

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Black and Blue at Yale—A Memoir

Phillip M. Richards

In the fall of 1968, my parents drove me from Cleveland to New Haven on a trip that took nearly twenty hours. We reached the Yale campus exhausted. It did not help that my parents were already tense, having watched inner-city Cleveland burn that summer. As a Head Start worker downtown, my mother had seen the emergence of a group of black radicals floating among the government-run programs, establishing political ties, gathering information—and hoarding weapons. When riots finally broke out, snipers shot at the firemen from darkened windows in the empty, rotten buildings. The next day, army jeeps and personnel carriers patrolled the street. My mother was stopped at a National Guard check point, and she cried. The great upheavals that had haunted my parents' dinnertime conversation had arrived.

Anxious as we approached the campus, my father wondered whether he should put on a sport coat. He was surprised to see large crowds of mild-mannered parents, many of them in T-shirts, carrying their children's clothes into the dormitories. Out in the large quad where freshmen were housed, there was bargaining for the old dressers, desks, and tables traditionally sold by upperclassmen to new students. The young arrivals smiled and waved at each other.

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Not everyone would adapt so easily. Early in my freshman year, a student dropped out after only three days—a much-celebrated case at the time and one I remember well because he was my roommate. He was from a small rural town in Pennsylvania, and his parents—an unfashionably stout woman in a rumpled dress and a bulky, fiftyish man, dressed in corduroy pants and a plaid shirt with a large grease spot—plainly were not prepared either for Yale or for the likes of me. On our first meeting, they stared for what seemed a good three minutes, in the incredulous manner that people from more cosmopolitan settings were rapidly learning to suppress in their encounters with blacks.

Even given this unpromising start, my roommate's departure offered food for thought. If the problem was me, he could always have found other lodging. As I grew acclimated to Yale, however, other possibilities came to mind. For one thing, he had loaded himself up with science courses in a way that showed a familiar kind of arrogance that could well have been covering for a familiar kind of fright. Then, too, considering his air of silent, self-conscious uprightness, he might easily have been spooked by the availability, or rather the ubiquity, of drugs in our entryway at Wright Hall. Even by Yale standards, the pharmaceutical presence was extraordinary. I had never seen a marijuana cigarette before, but by the end of my first week I had had an opportunity to contemplate my first kilo—

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two plain brown shopping bags filled with something that looked like straw.

In my roommate's case, the psychological dislocation caused by living amid this suburban contraband might have been intensified by the *froideur*, the preppy cool, with which it was regarded by those around us. I asked my dorm adviser about the legal jeopardy involved in having, by my count, ten tabs of acid in the open medicine cabinet of our communal bathroom. A self-assured, Asian-American law student, possessed of a tall, leggy black girlfriend, the adviser chuckled quietly, never breaking the reserve by means of which Ivy League graduates like him let freshmen from the Midwest know just how innocent they really were. After about a month at Yale, I came to see my departed white roommate as a secret sharer, and his frightened silence as a screen on which I projected my own terror.

YALE WOULD not go co-ed until the following year, but at some point during my second semester a week was devoted to hosting girls interested in attending as new enrollees or transfer students. By means unknown to me, my bedroom was commandeered by what seems to have been the most sexually active female undergraduate on the East coast—a judgment in which I persist to this day despite my awareness of how fierce the competition for that honor must have been in the spring of 1969.

In her perpetual state of dishabille, this young woman was a fantasy extension of the weekending girls from sister schools who used to sit in the living rooms of our dorm suites with their short woolen skirts, in plaid patterns much as their mothers might have worn, rucked up to the thighs. Basking in the prestige of Smith, Vassar, Mount Holyoke, they glowed with the casual elitism of high SAT scores, radical politics, and a carefully cultivated illusion of sexual availability. "F—," enjoined my dorm adviser at the end of one of his long philosophical discourses. He said it calmly, not licentiously, in the rational patrician manner in which, I supposed, the act itself was being performed by my classmates all around me.

In light of everything else that was going on at Yale, perhaps the most unexpected element in the school's democratic "revolution" was the blacks. Hardly, it seemed, had America's upper-middle-class whites absorbed the revolt of their own children, with the attendant disruption of every settled habit and expectation of life, than they were being forced to confront the new presence of African-Americans in their midst. In 1967, more than a hundred of America's inner cities had burned, and the next years were no better. Power is holy in American life, and I suspect that the sheer force of violence wielded by blacks in those years had earned them a certain grim respect.

Still, anyone seeking to avoid blacks at Yale could do so, simply by declining to sit at any of the all-black tables that had quickly formed in the residential colleges and common dining rooms. And here we come upon one of the paradoxes of the time: by 1970, the white liberal class, even as it vociferously proclaimed its abhorrence of apartheid in South Africa, had made its peace with the similar arrangements springing up as if spontaneously in the great American universities. John P. Trinkaus, an eminent biologist who was the master of my college, would shock me by defending this reconstructed color line. In the new order, he explained, blacks had achieved an admirable autonomy, refusing to imitate those unctuous Negroes who would once do anything to make their way in the academic, political, and social worlds of the American university.

Nor was that the end of the paradox. What struck me most about the new racial dispensation was the undeniable attraction exercised by black radicals on upper-class whites, and vice versa. As a high-school senior, I had read E. Franklin Frazier's *The Black Bourgeoisie* and been impressed by its thesis that the black middle class had created a play world completely imitative of bourgeois white society. At Yale, it was instead the black separatists who, in the end, would be tapped for membership in the college's exclusive senior societies. A new game had begun, and these young black activists were playing it with a skill and cynicism that made most white young men look as politically and sexually impotent as the sassy roughness of Aretha Franklin's songs hinted they were.

An article published in the *Yale Alumni Journal* during my freshman year quoted one well-known American black intellectual questioning the relevance of traditional education to African-American students. Another black leader cited in the same article fretted about balancing his black consciousness with his three-piece suit. At the time, I dismissed all this as a form of vulgar philistinism that had no place at a university. Looking back, I am half-charmed by the Babbitt-like chutzpah with which cultural nationalism, with all its repressions, came to serve the needs of an emerging black middle class displaced from its traditional centers of socialization.

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Whatever radical sympathies I myself brought to Yale were destroyed by the protests in May 1970 surrounding the trial in New Haven of the Black Panther leader Huey Newton. It was a week in which apocalyptic rumors of the imminent physical destruction of the Yale campus spread throughout academic communities of the East.

To the snickering of some of my peers, I had decided to go back to Cleveland to wait out the turmoil. As I was departing for the airport, I suddenly saw the family of one of my white classmates arriving from New York in their Volvo station wagon. Apparently, my classmate's younger brother had insisted on coming up to take part in the adventure. Their mother, still slender in her forties, was dressed in a linen summer suit. Stepping out of the car to kiss her younger son, she dramatically placed both hands around his face in a show of concern. I was not moved. The stuffed briefcase I carried, with material for papers on Wallace Stevens and T.S. Eliot, was my answer to the upper-class Babylon I was beginning to despise.

Returning to Yale after a long weekend at home, I was met in my entryway by a close friend who informed me that in the heat of the spring air, a couple had copulated nude on one of the green billiard tables in the basement of Branford College. Whether or not it happened was beside the point; the rumor itself captured the atmosphere of lurid exhibitionism that had assumed center stage that week. The friend who conveyed the report, a shrewd, witty, gay student of comparative literature, seemed uncharacteristically taken aback by how far things had gone.

I could hardly pretend to be immune. Although I eventually managed to graduate from Yale cum laude with honors in English, I was too traumatized by the cultural and sexual derangements around me to concentrate on schoolwork for my last two years. My major activity was combing the stacks of Sterling library at night and devouring my finds—Blake, Whitman, Emerson, Melville, Hawthorne, Flaubert, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Heine, Wordsworth, Yeats, Du Bois, Frost, Leavis, Trilling, Howe, Kazin, Auden, Roethke, Ellison, Didion, Auerbach, Sontag—in the huge stuffed chairs, surrounded by the refreshingly nun-like female graduate students who favored long woolen skirts, gray stockings, and plain, low-heeled shoes.

Of my few friends, most were Jewish, the sons of successful academics or businessmen. In the spring, we would occasionally spend weekends at a roommate's summer house in East Hampton—digging clams, making chowder, riding the family cabin cruiser to the small harbor. I had never before drunk Cointreau, seen a Long Island summer home, smelled the Sound, or eaten raw oysters culled in the shallows with a rake. One late spring evening, I met a crowd of New York literati at a dinner party out there. Much of the conversation turned on whether the druggie motorcycle film *Easy Rider* was the American epic of my generation—an opinion I then rejected but which was true in ways that are painful to admit. Late at night I fell into a long conversation about Proust with a book editor, a quiet, smart woman with a slight British accent. Tom Wolfe was already making great literary havoc of these people and their ways, but in contrast to what was happening in New Haven, the image of their luminous civility makes up my most pleasant memory of my Yale years.

On campus, questions of cultural identity had very quickly formed around static notions of blackness and whiteness. The crucial markers for blacks were soul music, black dialect, and other more evanescent points of racial style. No criticism was more damning than the suggestion that a fellow black was acting white. I began to see that the various personal estrangements described by my literary heroes—Joyce, Dostoevsky, Thoreau—were not just imaginative artifacts, let alone a beneficial vantage point on society, but something far more serious. Real alienation, I discovered, was loneliness and inner emptiness.

Among my most vivid memories of the time is a series of photographs, published in a student journal, of the Yale quads without a soul in them. Whether the photos were meant to evoke a feeling of serenity or to capture the sense of desertion experienced by an outsider at a school for insiders, what they pictured is what I saw from my window when everyone else was at a football game or some other big event. My quest for any kind of organized camaraderie had long since given out. In my unhealthy mental state, the crowded desolation of Yale's campus was like a premonition of what it might finally mean to be a black in American society.

Of course, isolation of this kind was the price paid at the time by many blacks, in many different institutions. I had a shock of recognition when, in a *New York Times Magazine* article, I read that the distinguished psychologist Kenneth Clark, then a professor at the City University of New York, was feeing as paranoid as any other black academic who had the misfortune of being on record as an advo-

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cate of racial integration. At Yale I came to realize that my presence violated one of the deepest taboos in American life—the racial boundary hedged around the life of the mind.

I certainly felt a hint of this taboo when, in class, eyes would lift every time I found a Miltonic allusion in Wordsworth, a dramatic irony in a Joyce story, or a pattern of sound and sense in Donne. Like all scholarship boys, I took my hard-earned learning more seriously than those who had acquired it at home or in private secondary schools. But there was also something else going on in these looks of surprise and condescension. If, as the new orthodoxy held, blacks needed to immerse themselves in *black* culture for their emotional and psychological well-being, then I was engaged in a fundamentally sick activity.

Few blacks at Yale had negotiated this conundrum. One of them was the best student in my freshman English class. He had mastered the task of close reading long before me, and would go on to get a Rhodes scholarship. An excellent fencer, he was on very jovial terms with the other members of the team, exemplifying the kind of comradeship so conspicuously on display in the school's beautifully illustrated brochures. Despite my attempts to engage him in conversation, he never said more than two or three words to me. When I moved into Yale's all-black dormitory in my senior year, I found that none of my fellow students there knew of him. I envied him deeply—he had made his separate peace with Yale and kept his balance in what I increasingly saw as a psychological high-wire act.

Very little of the counseling that I got at Yale was useful. One therapist, a tall black man, encouraged me to attend meetings of the radical Black Student Alliance. He ferociously attacked the claims I made for my parents' wisdom and accused me of making myself odd out of sheer perversity. Our sessions ceased after he shaved off all his hair and donned a gold earring.

More successful was the therapist who asked me about myself, looked up my academic record, bluntly inquired what I expected from life, and said I should wait a month before seeing him again. Seizing the glimmer of sanity he seemed to be holding out, I ventured that things could not be as bad as I thought.

AND INDEED, during my final year, my day-to-day existence calmed. I met a number of black graduate students whom I still count as some of the brightest people I have ever known. One of them, a law student named Susan, flirted charmingly with me, and I followed her everywhere. Another, a recent graduate of Atlanta's Spelman College, gave me a taste of the scorn that alumni of predominantly Negro colleges felt for black Ivy League arrivistes.

For the first time, too, I began to take an interest in the many well-known people who came to speak at Yale. One especially memorable event was a poetry reading by Robert Lowell. Elegantly dressed in a tweed coat and regimental tie, his high forehead wreathed with graying hair, Lowell was already a canonical figure. He walked slowly, spoke in measured tones, and gave every sign of the exhaustion one might have expected from reading about his disordered personal life. Already in the Indian summer of his eminence, Lowell at that moment possessed enormous personal dignity.

In the crowd were not only the literary types one usually saw at this sort of occasion but some seedily dressed radicals. Most of them were there because of Lowell's role in the anti-Vietnam-war movement and the 1967 march on the Pentagon, done to a turn by Norman Mailer in *The Armies of the Night*. In his book, Mailer had stressed the conservative aspects of Lowell's character, career, and New England family connections—qualities that made everything he wrote seem instantly a part of American history. For the upper-class undergraduate radicals in attendance, there was another element as well: Lowell's well-known sexual and psychological derangements had made him a sort of contemporary. The heavy burden of fame, the Harvard affectations, and the medication that stooped his shoulders and blurred his speech no doubt served to reassure any of them who might be hoping that their own, parentally subsidized roads of excess could lead to a similar palace of wisdom.

I noticed only one other black student among the nearly 200 people in the hall. We may have nodded to each other, but I do not think we spoke. At such events, looking for other blacks was an idle, almost automatic habit of mine, picked up from my mother. Whenever we would go to an art museum or concert, she would denounce Cleveland's black middle class for its absence. But in the "enlightened" 1970's, no one minded the absence of blacks, even at a reading by so acclaimed an American poet as Lowell. Were not blacks engaged in the creation of a new culture of their own? Their absence was to be seen not as a sign of delinquency but as the necessary consequence of having other fish to fry.

Lowell's message was a tragic one, but it was tempered by an upper-class form of optimism or

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resignation. Great civilizations—Greece, Rome, Britain—had risen and fallen, and, he suggested, would rise and fall again. The waning of America was itself part of an organic process, an altogether typical stage in the life of an imperial civilization. The best and most accomplished societies would decline, their best and most sophisticated poets urbanely bidding them farewell.

For all of its questionable apprehension, Lowell's view was a deeply civilizing one and, in its pointed elitism, rather comforting, too. There was much talk in the late 1960's and early 70's about the emptiness of tradition and all received ideas, but I suspect the real reason Lowell's presence was valued so highly by his mostly young, mostly white audience lay precisely in the deep consolations of the classical literary tradition that he brought to the tumultuous present. He helped even the most frenzied radicals among us to accept the traumas of the day as part of the human condition. Moreover, he was an elder in the great city of learning who, on the page and at public events, treated his fellow citizens with grace and deference. Speaking to his audience at Yale, he implicitly affirmed the idea of the academy, then under ferocious and seemingly terminal attack from within, as a place where art, politics, and youth might not only coexist but thrive.

A SECOND memorable event of my senior year was a panel discussion featuring Kenneth Clark and Martin Kilson, the two preeminent black social scientists of the day. The evening began auspiciously, with a cocktail party at my residential college for the honored guests. As was the custom, a lottery was held to select the students who would attend. All of the winners, it turned out, were black.

I was particularly excited to have been selected. In Cleveland I had grown up with very few heroes, and Kenneth Clark was one of them. My mother kept a copy of *Prejudice and Your Child* on top of her bureau. She shared Clark's view, most famously set out in the research cited in *Brown* v. *Board of Education*, that segregation had had an extremely destructive effect on the psychological development of black children.

Whether this was really true or not—my graduate-student friend from Spelman disputed it—I remained deeply sympathetic to Clark. In its own way, his analysis highlighted the deep fears and anxieties one sensed in the black middle-class students who were increasingly segregating *themselves* into separate lunch tables and dorms. Living in such a dorm during my senior year, I found no black nirvana but a middle class as parochial and nervous as I had ever known it to be in Cleveland. Clark understood that, for all their claims of pride and autonomy, the black separatists were implicitly re-creating the terms, and legitimating the idea, of black inferiority.

A slender, elegantly dressed man, Clark arrived at the cocktail party and quickly repaired to a corner for quiet conversation. Much more noticeable was Kilson, who was busily engaged in dialogue with a crowd of black students. An expert on African politics and Harvard's first tenured black professor, Kilson had by then become a well-known commentator on African-American political, social, and intellectual life, writing for magazines like the *American Scholar*, *Dissent*, and *Encounter*. Though a firm opponent of the war in Vietnam, he was also a critic of the infantile Left, especially as it found expression in black militancy at elite universities. Despite the controversy swirling around him, he plainly loved the give-and-take of university life.

Clark did not speak up until we gathered for dinner. Clearly disgusted that he had been greeted by an all-black group of students, he held forth on the price that we paid for our voluntary separatism. Did we know that our white liberal teachers gave us A's and B's to keep us out of their faces? Could we imagine how much lower our entrance-exam scores had been than those of our white peers? By the time dinner ended and the two speakers made their way to the auditorium, their joint intention was clear. Both men had taken huge amounts of abuse from student radicals in the past few years, and tonight the tables would be turned.

The real fireworks were saved for the question-and-answer session, when the black nationalists who had drifted in during the proceedings rose to ask their predictably long, polemical questions. These young men were the bane of visiting black middle-class academics, whom they loved to intimidate with jargon and accusations of Uncle Tomism. But this was exactly what Kilson and Clark had anticipated. Kilson was direct and blunt, rising to an eloquent attack on black anti-intellectualism. Clark, with a nearly noble haughtiness, asked of one incoherent question, "Do I have to answer this?," his forehead creased with the weariness of having responded to a hundred such questions at a hundred such events. Kilson concluded on a note of deep pessimism about the future. Clark, asked if blacks would survive, replied with a bitter smile that they would, as they always had, through the mother wit of their folk tradition.

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KENNETH CLARK and Martin Kilson were attacking elements of black culture in the university that really ran through the whole of the radical student movement, white and black alike: its self-satisfaction, its parochialism, its moral cynicism, and above all its hard-core philistinism. Years later, I would read Clark's sharp analysis of the black-studies programs through which young African-American militants had won undeserved academic concessions from intimidated administrators. I had already noticed how, coming into their brave new world, many blacks of my generation had, in effect, pledged that they would not violate the established intellectual turf but would instead create their own—and were welcomed on those terms. What was really emerging, Clark now wrote, was an updated form of white paternalism, one in which complicit blacks would be given "what they wanted," only to be undone later by their own inadequacies.

This may impute too much cynicism to all of the parties involved. What is undeniable, however, is the fact that the American university was collapsing as an institution at the very moment when blacks were entering it en masse. This was a historical irony of truly tragic proportions. Despite the many high-achieving black students at Yale, the perception was unmistakable that formal academic standards had been changed to accommodate them. Yet these were the very same standards that, as a consequence of a widespread student "revolution," were everywhere in the process of being scuttled or driven underground—the very same standards whose enforcement would have rewarded those blacks willing and able to work to meet them.

A still crueler irony was that the new notions of African-American "pride" had so little to offer to the black masses in whose ostensible interests they were being developed and publicized. During my senior year, I volunteered to teach at a small high school in New Haven run by a group of blacks from Yale. The first text I assigned consisted of selections from W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Eager to initiate my young African-American charges in the power of Du Bois's thought, I began the next class by talking about the reading, only to be met with looks of utter incomprehension. I asked a student to read aloud the opening line of the first essay and quickly discovered the problem: he could not recognize half the words.

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OBSERVATIONS

Lessons of the Cloning Scandal

Kevin Shapiro

BY NOW most well-informed people know the sorry tale of Hwang Woo Suk, the South Korean veterinarian who rose to scientific superstardom as a pioneer of cloning—and who fell just as quickly when it came to light that his "breakthroughs" had mostly been fabricated, and rather sloppily at that. Hwang, who had been awarded the title of "supreme scientist" and an annual grant of some $3 million by the South Korean government, has now been suspended from his chair at Seoul National University (SNU), and his numerous collaborators face varying degrees of censure.

The facts of the case are relatively straightforward. In February 2004, Hwang surprised the world when he announced that he and his team had created human embryonic stem cells from donor eggs. The announcement was followed by the publication of a report in the American journal *Science*, in which Hwang and his colleagues described how they had extracted the nucleus of an adult cell and inserted it into an egg cell from the same donor whose own nucleus had been removed. They then purportedly coaxed the egg cell to divide until it yielded embryonic stem cells—a trick that succeeded after 242 attempts. In layman's terms, this was the first report of successful human cloning.

Whatever its moral implications, from a scientific standpoint this was no trivial achievement. Although Dolly the sheep had been born in 1996, shattering the assumption that mammals could not be cloned, many developmental biologists felt that it would be much harder to clone humans because of quirks in the way our chromosomes are modified during the normal development of sperm and egg cells. Hwang's team seemed to show not only that somatic-cell nuclear transfer (the technical term for cloning) worked with humans, but that the procedure was relatively efficient, requiring far fewer donor eggs than had previously been thought possible.

A year later, in May 2005, Hwang announced a second coup: the creation of eleven different stem-cell lines, using embryos cloned from the genetic material of people of different ages and genders. Another supporting paper in *Science* soon followed. If the first paper represented an important advance, the second was a marvel, holding out the possibility of creating custom-tailored embryonic stem cells for patients suffering from ailments like diabetes and Parkinson's disease. Therapies developed from such cells would skirt the potential problem of immune rejection. Indeed, Hwang suggested that the technique might soon be ready for therapeutic application. To top it all off, he declared in August that his team had been the first to clone a dog, an Afghan hound christened Snuppy (for Seoul National University puppy).

In retrospect, Snuppy may have been the dog that broke the camel's back: the feat propelled Hwang to new heights of fame, but the attention brought with it greater scrutiny. The first whiff of something rotten aired in November 2005, when Hwang's American collaborator Gerald Schatten, a biologist at the University of Pittsburgh, sought to dissociate himself from the Korean

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team, citing ethical concerns about how the donor eggs were obtained. Subsequent revelations—that individual donors had been paid as much as $1,400, and that some of the eggs had come from one of Hwang's graduate students—suggested that the work had been done in flagrant violation of international research norms.

Hwang's defenders in South Korea dismissed these concerns as alien to Korean society, and denounced investigations into the issue as "unpatriotic." But the dike had already broken. Skeptical scientists pointed out that some of the figures accompanying Hwang's second *Science* paper appeared to be duplicates of one another. Some American biologists proposed that outside scientists be allowed to examine Hwang's materials; he declined to cooperate. By January 2006, a panel of investigators at SNU had determined that there was no evidence to support any of Hwang's claims about human cloning. The only real clone produced by the SNU lab turned out to be Snuppy.

THOUGH BY now the furor has largely subsided, there seems to be a lingering uncertainty about what lessons, if any, to draw from the Hwang affair. Almost everyone agrees that the revelation of his deception has not closed the book on his line of research. As David Shaywitz, an endocrinologist at the (privately funded) Harvard Stem Cell Institute, wrote in a *New York Times* op-ed, understanding the complex biology of stem cells might "take a very long time," but "stellar science" is still being done, and the field is too promising to be abandoned. Shaywitz's colleague Douglas Melton, a developmental biologist, told the *Washington Post* that "[w]hat happened in Korea hasn't sped up or slowed down our progress."

Nor do editors of prominent scientific journals seem very concerned. Though they have promised to screen high-profile submissions more carefully in the future, most seem to believe that this sort of thing just happens from time to time. The editor of *Science*, Donald Kennedy, told an audience at Stanford University that "scientific fraud is not new," and that he did not "think any reviewer could detect fraud if it was carried out by a capable scientist who knows how to walk the walk."

As for general-interest reporting on these issues, Laura Chang, science editor of the *New York Times*, admitted that most major newspapers turn to respected journals for their science news, relying on them to decide not only what constitutes good research but also what kind of research is exciting and important. "That will not change," she matter-of-factly told a reporter from her own paper.

Indeed, some have suggested that the Hwang scandal is little more than a particularly outrageous example of the kind of fraud that occurs in all human endeavors. According to this view—one might call it the "bad apple" theory—most scientists are diligent, honest, and objectively-minded seekers of knowledge. Every so often, however, one of them decides to skip the research stage and simply fabricate his results, motivated by the promise of fame or the conviction that his ideas are so important that he should not have to bother with the messy work of gathering data. Such a scientist may get away with deception in the short term, but he will eventually be caught: someone will raise questions, or a co-worker will come clean, or other researchers will fail to replicate his results, thereby raising suspicions of fraud or incompetence. The cheater will face disgrace, and the honest scientists will return to business as usual.

The most important implication of this view is that we should not let an occasional scandal lead us to question the scientific enterprise or its practitioners. This was the thrust of a *Washington Post* editorial by the Yale historian Bettyann Holtzmann Kevles, who pointed to infamous incidents like the Piltdown hoax and the swindle of William Summerlin—a physician who, in 1974, tried to pass off ink blots on the backs of white mice as patches of skin tissue transplanted from unrelated black-skinned mice.

There are more recent illustrations as well. Just a few years ago, in 2002 and 2003, the journals *Science* and *Nature* between them withdrew 15 papers authored by Jan Hendrik Schön, a German scientist working at Bell Labs who fraudulently claimed to have made groundbreaking discoveries in the physics of nanoscale transistors. Despite Schön's malfeasance, the field of nanotechnology is still flourishing, even if it no longer appears that a revolution in electronics is just on the horizon.

THAT SAID, the "bad apple" theory all too conveniently exculpates the enablers of scientific fraud, namely, the major scientific journals and their criers in the popular press. It is probably true that a meticulous cheat can produce results so realistic that they would be impossible to expose until other scientists failed to reproduce them. Curiously, however, this is not what scientific fraud usually looks like; most examples of fake data are astoundingly shoddy. Like Hwang, Schön was caught when it was noticed that his results seemed too good to be true—and that he had used the same graph for three different experiments. In both cases, moreover, outside scientists rang alarm bells shortly after the fraudulent data were published, which raises the question of how the cheaters advanced as far as they did.

It is well known among scientists that the most prestigious journals—like *Science*, *Nature*, and the *New England Journal of Medicine*—sometimes base their selection of articles on factors that can have little to do with the quality of the research they report. Benjamin Lewin, a geneticist and scientific entrepreneur who founded the al-

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most as prestigious journal *Cell*, put it bluntly when he told the *New York Times* that "*Nature* and *Science* don't have the reputation for rigorous review."

When papers arrive at the editorial offices of these journals, they are first vetted for their potential impact: if a paper is deemed insufficiently interesting, it is returned to the authors with the suggestion that they try their luck with a more pedestrian journal. If the editors decide that a paper is interesting enough to warrant peer review, its fate may still depend less on its merits than on how strongly they feel about publishing it. A paper on a "hot" topic, with high potential impact, might be sent to a few reviewers likely to be friendly; by contrast, a solid paper on a less fashionable topic might be subjected to a higher degree of scrutiny.

In the past few years, stem-cell research has been among the hottest of hot fields, for political as well as scientific reasons. The editors of the *New England Journal of Medicine* announced in 2003 that they would make a special effort to seek out "highly meritorious manuscripts" on embryonic stem-cell research and somatic-cell nuclear transfer—partly because they were interested in undermining "unreasonable" legislative efforts to restrict such research. In other words, the journal was expending some of its prestige to advance a particular agenda. Shaywitz, the Harvard endocrinologist, conceded that "the bar for publication in this field often has appeared remarkably low, with even well-respected research journals seeming to fall over one another for the privilege of publishing the next hot paper."

THIS LEADS to a second take on the Hwang fiasco, which one might call the "hope and hype" hypothesis (a term I borrow from the title of Shaywitz's op-ed piece). This view holds, essentially, that science is ill-served by unrealistic expectations. The excitement about stem cells, for example, no doubt has much to do with the promise they appear to hold for the treatment of devastating diseases—a promise that has been greatly exaggerated in the popular mind. Newspaper articles about stem-cell research inevitably mention that discoveries in the field might one day lead to such cures. Although he was later ridiculed by commentators, Senator John Edwards sounded credible to many Americans when, as a candidate in 2004, he declared that stem-cell research would soon enable quadriplegics like Christopher Reeve to "get up out of that wheelchair and walk again." Hwang himself made a similar claim for the stem-cell therapies that would result from his cloning research, and his pledge was inscribed on a South Korean postage stamp. Such hype creates an environment that invites opportunistic fakery.

There is nothing inherently dishonest, of course, about the claim that embryonic stem-cell research and therapeutic cloning could lead to remarkable advances in treating disease; they just might. It is worth keeping in mind, however, that other seemingly promising avenues for treatment have shown themselves to be ridden with stumbling blocks. Over the last two decades, we have heard a great deal, for example, about the potential of gene therapy—the idea that a person suffering from a certain disease because of a missing or defective copy of a particular gene could be treated by having a new, functional copy inserted into his cells. But the field has advanced very slowly since the death of an eighteen-year-old man during a clinical trial in 1999. Research on another initially successful gene therapy for an immune-deficiency syndrome was halted in 2003 when it was found that the treatment might lead to leukemia.

A surfeit of hype also opens the door to slipshod research that can tarnish the reputation of entire fields. Following the development of new techniques in molecular genetics in the 1980's and early 90's, the popular press was filled with reports that biologists had discovered genes "for" everything from extroversion to homosexuality—claims of a sort encountered much less frequently these days. Likewise, the advent of noninvasive brain imaging about a decade ago unleashed a slew of quasi-phrenological "discoveries" about areas of the brain that supposedly underlie various aspects of human thought.

Still, for all the value of calls for scientific modesty, it is hard to see what would motivate many scientists if they did not think they were working to find big solutions to big problems. When researchers say that an answer is tantalizingly close, the chances are that they believe it, even if what they mean by "close" is that they hope to succeed after a lifetime of painstaking experimentation. A bit of exaggeration is to be expected—without it, fewer scientists would attempt ambitious research, and less money would be available to fund it.

IF EXCESS hype and misplaced hope are one part of the explanation for the Hwang episode, a deeper cause lies in the power of ideology in science. It is hardly a revelation that scientists, like everyone else, have ideological commitments that sometimes influence their judgment. "Ideological," it should be said, is not always synonymous with "political": heated scientific debates can break out over topics of no obvious social relevance, like whether turtles are more related to birds or lizards, or whether the brain possesses inherent rules for acquiring grammar (I think it does, a matter on which I happen to agree with Noam Chomsky, whose political views are quite different from my own). Such debates can sometimes provide the intellectual fuel for highly productive lines of research.

It is a cause for concern, however, when ideological commitments get in the way of free inquiry instead of advancing it. When the editors of

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the *New England Journal of Medicine* declare their intention to promote embryonic stem-cell research, they send a signal to funding bodies that such research should take priority over less favored subjects. One casualty of this campaign has been work on adult—as opposed to embryonic—stem cells.

There are, to be sure, plenty of problems with adult stem cells, not least that they are less versatile, and thus less potentially useful, than their embryonic counterparts. But embryonic cells are also tricky to work with, and it has been suggested that they may be more susceptible to harmful mutations—which, quite properly, does not seem to have dampened the enthusiasm of many biologists working on them.

So why *has* research on embryonic cells been favored in the journals and by many scientists over research on adult cells? Much of the answer, unfortunately, is purely political: because any success in adult stem-cell research would give ammunition to the (often religious) opponents of the embryonic kind. Worse, from the point of view of growing numbers in the scientific community, such work is favored by President Bush, who decided in 2001 to withhold government funding from research involving newly created embryonic stem-cell lines and subsequently endorsed a moratorium on cloning. In these circumstances, when a prominent biologist declares that research on adult stem cells is a sideshow or a dead-end, it is difficult to believe that his assessment is based on science rather than dogma.

Similar problems can be seen in other highly politicized scientific debates. The editor of *Science*, Donald Kennedy, who happens to have run the Food and Drug Administration under President Carter, has lately been an outspoken critic of scientists who voice skepticism about global warming. Kennedy is certainly entitled to his opinion, and he can cite empirical research to back up his argument. He has also claimed that *Science* simply does not receive any credible manuscripts that challenge the prevailing view, a statement that some have interpreted as evidence that the matter has been settled conclusively. But is it any wonder that scientists who harbor doubts about the global-warming hypothesis do not bother to send their papers to *Science*, where they will be summarily rejected—or perhaps do not pursue research in climate change at all, since they would have a better chance of publishing in prestigious journals (and winning research grants) in other areas?

Because the structure of academic science automatically gives the upper hand to majority opinion, a dominant ideology, once established, is hard to overturn. When the Danish statistician Bjørn Lomborg published *The Skeptical Environmentalist* in 2001, marshalling reams of data to suggest that common claims about global warming and other supposed environmental woes were unsubstantiated, he was showered with scorn by prominent environmental scientists, including in the pages of *Science*—and hauled before an investigative panel under Denmark's Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation on charges of scientific misconduct. Lomborg was exonerated, and the case was closed in 2004. But the perception of a scandal has encouraged many scientists, not to mention the mainstream media, to ignore his work.

THE PUBLIC credibility of science depends to some degree on the willingness of scientists to reject absolutist claims about what kinds of concerns are valid and important, and what kinds are not. The problem has long been familiar within the scientific community: inflexible paradigms tend to promote research that upholds the consensus view while impeding innovation and making it hard to pursue dissenting ideas.

In today's more science-savvy world, however, curbing the influence of scientific dogma is not just an internal affair. In a survey conducted by the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center in 2000, 41 percent of respondents reported that they had a great deal of confidence in the leadership of the scientific community—putting scientists ahead of educators and just behind doctors on this measure. But such confidence seems to be linked to the perception that scientific researchers work strictly for the good of humanity, staying out of politics and other divisive arenas.

Should this perception change, public confidence in science may slip, just as confidence in the medical establishment has eroded over the past 30 years as health-care issues have become increasingly politicized. It may become correspondingly harder for scientists to influence social debates in which they have a genuine stake. If researchers' pronouncements about contentious issues like global warming and stem cells are seen to be ideologically motivated, it will be that much more difficult to persuade the public that a theory like Intelligent Design does not merit attention in the realm of science.

The stem-cell scandal reminds us not only that we need to take the judgment of even the most esteemed experts with a grain of salt but also that science, far from being a purely objective pursuit, is colored by the predilections and biases of its practitioners. Empirical truth is still out there to be discovered, and scientific induction—susceptible as it may be to error, prejudice, and fraud—is still the best means we have to discover it. But what truth we discover depends, very often, on where we decide to look for it.

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MUSIC

Mister Waller's Regrets

Terry Teachout

THOMAS WRIGHT WALLER, born in Harlem in 1904 and subsequently known to all the world as "Fats," is one of the few great jazz musicians to have been widely popular with the public at large. He appeared often on radio, and the small-group recordings he made between 1934 and 1942 sold well—several were hits—and were heard frequently on jukeboxes. In addition, he wrote the music for such standards as "Ain't Misbehavin'" and "Honeysuckle Rose," and at the time of his death in 1943 he had a successful show on Broadway, *Early to Bed*. Though Hollywood was slower to catch on to his potential, Waller's appearance with Lena Horne and Bill "Bojangles" Robinson in *Stormy Weather* (in which he performed "Ain't Misbehavin'") was favorably noticed, and he would surely have made more films had he not died shortly after *Stormy Weather* was released.[1]

Perhaps inevitably, Waller's popularity caused some to doubt his musical seriousness—though it never led anyone to question his talent. As a pianist he was universally admired and immensely influential, and he left behind ample recorded evidence of his formidable gifts. He was no less accomplished as an organist, the first to play hard-swinging jazz on that cumbersome instrument. But what made Waller a celebrity was not his instrumental prowess but his singing, which he usually (though not always) played for laughs. Most of his hit records were of Tin Pan Alley ballads like "It's a Sin to Tell a Lie" and "Until the Real Thing Comes Along," whose sentimentalities he skewered with satirical asides.

That Waller was primarily known as a comedian and entertainer rather than as a musician is a continuing source of discomfort to many critics. Gunther Schuller spoke for them in his 1968 book *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development*:

> Waller was ultimately unable to reconcile the conflicts in his musical personality: a natural gift for effortless improvisation[,] . . . the opposing pull toward commercial and show-business success, and finally his unswerving respect and love for "classical" music. Deep down the latter undermined his convictions about his professional career as a pianist-singer-clown, and the clowning was in turn an attempt to conceal his inner confusion.[2]

This appraisal would be less convincing had it not been shared by Waller himself, who played Bach, Chopin, and Debussy privately for his own pleasure and studied with the legendary piano virtuoso Leo-

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[1] *Handful of Keys* (Proper Records PROPERBOX 71, four CD's), a budget-priced box set imported from England but easily available in the U.S., contains a well-chosen selection of 95 recorded performances by Waller. Except as indicated, it contains all the recordings mentioned in this article.

[2] Schuller went so far as to omit Waller from the second volume of his critical history of jazz, *The Swing Era: The Development of Jazz, 1930-1945* (1989). No less revealingly, Waller has yet to be the subject of a full-length primary-source biography, and only one extended analysis of his musical style, Paul S. Machlin's excellent *Stride: The Music of Fats Waller* (1985), has been published to date. Also of interest is Alyn Shipton's *Fats Waller: The Cheerful Little Earful* (1988, rev. 2002).

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pold Godowsky.[3] He told numerous colleagues that he regretted the turn his career had taken, and he both admired and envied his friend George Gershwin for writing both popular songs and jazz-influenced concert works, something the less disciplined Waller was never able to do. His sole gesture to conventional musical respectability, a 1942 Carnegie Hall recital appearance, was a fiasco. By then he had become a full-fledged alcoholic—he was drunk on stage at the recital—and it was this, coupled with his chronic obesity, that led to his death from pneumonia at the untimely age of thirty-nine.

Fats Waller, then, died a disappointed man. But how disappointing is the body of work he left behind? *Did* he fail to live up to his creative potential, as Schuller and countless other critics have argued?

TO APPRECIATE the reservations of Waller's critics, one must first consider his achievements as an instrumentalist.

The son of a lay preacher, Waller started out as a church and theater organist, and for the rest of his life he preferred the organ to the piano. "I can get so much more color from it than the piano that it really sends me," he explained. Fortunately, the Victor studio in Camden, New Jersey, where he made many of his early recordings, was a converted church that housed a well-maintained pipe organ, and in the late 20's he recorded a series of solos that reveal him to have been an imaginative, technically adept player capable of drawing a marvelously diverse array of tone colors from the instrument.[4]

Even so, it was as a pianist that Waller made his name. He played "stride" piano, a style that evolved out of ragtime, the musical idiom created at the end of the 19th century by Scott Joplin and other black composers. In classic ragtime, which is always written out, heavily syncopated right-hand melodies are superimposed atop "oom-pah" patterns played by the pianist's left hand. Stride, by contrast, is a fully improvised style in which the right-hand melodies are more complex and wide-ranging and the left-hand accompaniments thicker in texture and less rhythmically regular. It is more technically challenging than ragtime—so much so that comparatively few pianists have mastered it.

Waller studied with James P. Johnson (1894-1955), a Harlem-based pianist and composer who was one of the originators of stride.[5] The younger man's huge hands (George Shearing recalled that shaking hands with Waller was like "grabbing a bunch of bananas") were perfectly suited to its demands, and he quickly developed into one of New York's top jazz pianists.

By 1929 his style was fully formed, and the solo recordings he made in that year of his own "Handful of Keys" and "Numb Fumblin'" are among his most fully realized achievements. The first is a bustling up-tempo showpiece à la Johnson, the second an easy-going twelve-bar blues whose airy textures epitomize Waller's uniquely individual approach. "Keep the right hand always subservient to the melody," he once told an interviewer. "Trying to do too much always detracts from the tune. . . . You got to hang onto the melody and never let it get boresome." He lived by those words, with results aptly summed up by the poet and jazz critic Philip Larkin:

> As a jazz pianist he stands between James P. Johnson, who taught him, and Art Tatum, who learned from him, but it is he who has the greatest variety of mood, from feather-light whimsicality to the solid springing tenths in the left hand that never let the rhythm falter for a moment.

HAD WALLER never sung a note, he would still be remembered for the recordings he made on piano and organ in the late 20's, as well as for the popular songs he wrote in collaboration with the lyricist Andy Razaf. But he would not have become famous. Instead, he began to feature himself as a vocalist, and became one of the best-known black entertainers in America.

Waller appears to have started singing in public around 1929, first in cabarets, then on the radio. In 1931 he made his first recordings as a vocalist. Three years later, William Paley, the president of CBS, heard him at a New York party and gave him a spot on the network; the resulting exposure inspired Victor to sign him to an exclusive contract. Waller put together a six-piece band, billed as "Fats Waller and His Rhythm," with which he recorded the latest Tin Pan Alley songs, most of them in informal but effective arrangements that featured his ebullient vocals and glistening piano solos. These records soon began to sell, and all at once Waller became—and remained—a hot property.

The Rhythm recordings were usually jazz of the purest kind. Although Waller's regular accompanists were for the most part mere

[3] We have only Waller's word for this—his name appears nowhere in the published literature on Godowsky—but there is no obvious reason why he should have made it up. Godowsky did not have a major American concert career and was for the most part known only to pianists and connoisseurs of virtuoso piano playing.

[4] *Handful of Keys* contains one of the solo pipe-organ recordings Waller made in Camden, "Rusty Pail." Two dozen of his early solo and ensemble organ recordings, including an especially beautiful version of "Beale Street Blues" from 1927, are on *Fats Waller at the Organ: Vol. 3, 1926-1929* (EPM Musique 982222), an imported French CD.

[5] In 1941 Waller paid homage to his mentor by recording "Carolina Shout," Johnson's best-known composition. The performance offers a dramatic demonstration of the difference in the two men's styles: Johnson's, in his 1922 recording of "Carolina Shout," is precise and elegant, even dapper, while Waller's is faster, more flamboyant, and a bit slapdash.

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journeymen, they provided solid, swinging support for his wilder flights of verbal fancy. Sometimes he prefaced a song with a spoken introduction whose choice of words was deliberately askew: "My *goodness*, I feel so effervescent this morning. Everything's so eulogizin'!" ("I'm Crazy 'Bout My Baby," 1931). At other times he slipped his own sardonic interpolations into an otherwise cliché-ridden lyric: "If you break my heart I'll break your jaw and then I'll die" ("It's a Sin to Tell a Lie," 1936). On occasion he dispensed with tomfoolery and sang a ballad straight in his light, raspy baritone, invariably to wistful and engaging effect ("My Very Good Friend the Milkman," 1935).

Beneath their zany surface, Waller's vocals were the product of a highly creative musician who with endless ingenuity reshaped and paraphrased the melodies of the songs he sang. To hear him dally with a well-written tune like James P. Johnson's "A Porter's Love Song to a Chambermaid" (1934) or Harry Warren's "Lulu's Back in Town" (1935) is to hear a master improviser at work—arguably the first great jazz singer to follow Louis Armstrong, and one of the first to profit from Armstrong's unprecedented example.[6]

But unlike Armstrong, who was almost always glad to do whatever his audiences asked of him, Waller came to resent the fact that his fame as a singer-comedian made it difficult for him to play the music he liked best. As Gene Sedric, one of his sidemen, would recall:

> Many times we would be on the job and Waller [was] playing great piano, modern stuff with technique and fine chords, and people would say, "Come on, Fats, you're laying down, give us some jive." This at times would be a great drag to him; he would look at us and say, "You see these people, they won't let me play anything real fine, want to hear all that jive."

In the studio, by contrast, Waller was freer to play as he liked. Of his many recorded instrumentals with the Rhythm, some feature him on electric organ, an instrument whose percussive qualities he found appealing. Over time, the group became more contemporary in its approach, and later, riff-based Waller compositions like "Yacht Club Swing" (1938) and "Pantin' in the Panther Room" (1941, with Waller on electric organ) have a lightness of touch reminiscent of the then-popular John Kirby Sextet, a band he greatly admired.

In addition, Waller recorded three sets of instrumental solos in 1937, 1938, and 1941 that suggest even more clearly the stylistic directions in which he apparently longed to travel. From the lacy openwork filigree of his solo piano version of his own "Keepin' Out of Mischief Now" (1937) to the whirling, toccata-like ostinato with which he launches his arrangement for organ of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" (recorded on a 1938 visit to London), it is evident that Waller's musical ambitions extended well beyond the swing songs that delighted his fans.[7]

Would he have one day sought to emulate Gershwin, whose *Rhapsody in Blue* and Concerto in F he loved? It is possible, though his lack of compositional training would have presented a considerable obstacle. While he was a fluent and successful songwriter, his melodies, as Alec Wilder has pointed out, "are all made up of little pieces. . . . Each phrase is sustained by an imitation, or partial imitation, of the previous phrase. In a sense, he wrote like a barroom piano player."

In any case, Waller's notorious lack of self-discipline meant that large-scale projects were out of the question. Just as he habitually threw together his small-group recording sessions on the spot, so his only extended composition, the six-movement "London Suite" recorded in 1938, was little more than a series of loosely knit, semi-improvised character pieces of no particular structural originality or melodic distinction. About the debacle of his Carnegie Hall recital, at which he played "London Suite," the critics were barely polite.[8]

Not only was Waller incapable of summoning up the initiative to do more serious work, but his producers at Victor increasingly encouraged him to record third-rate songs that were beyond even his ability to enliven with the sly asides that had made him a star.[9] By that time, alcoholism was inexorably robbing him of his powers, and though he had hitherto been able to play well even when under the influence of what he blithely called "liquid ham and eggs," he was audibly and embarrassingly the worse for wear on several of the V-Discs he recorded in September 1943, three months before his death.

Perhaps the harshest posthumous judgment to be rendered on Fats Waller came from the critic Max Harrison:

> Waller's is probably the saddest

[6] Armstrong returned the compliment: his 1929 performance of "Ain't Misbehavin'" in the Broadway revue *Hot Chocolates* introduced him to white audiences, and he continued to sing and record Waller's songs for the rest of his life.

[7] "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" was last available on CD as part of *Fats Waller in London* (Disques Swing CDXP 6442), now out of print but occasionally available from used-CD dealers. It can also be heard in streaming audio at www.redhotjazz/fats.html. (A RealAudio player is needed to listen to this site, which also contains many of the other recordings mentioned in this piece.)

[8] *We Called It Music* (1947, rev. 1962), the autobiography of the jazz guitarist Eddie Condon, contains a sympathetic but frank description of the concert (at which Condon also played), along with an amusing, equally frank account of one of Waller's helter-skelter recording dates.

[9] Among the unsavory ditties foisted on Waller by Victor in the 40's were "Abercrombie Had a Zombie," "Eep, Ipe, Wanna Piece of Pie," "Little Curly Hair in a High Chair," and "My Mommie Sent Me to the Store."

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case of misspent talent which jazz on records can show. His output suggests he had all the gifts a jazzman needs except the tough, almost ruthless temperament usually necessary for the truest creative achievement.

If one goes only by the recordings Waller made in the last few years of his life, there is something to be said for this devastating appraisal. But even then, as can be heard in such performances as "Fats Waller's Original E Flat Blues" (1940), "Pantin' in the Panther Room," and the explosive small-band version of "Ain't Misbehavin'" recorded in 1943 for the soundtrack of *Stormy Weather*, he was still capable of rising to an occasion that inspired him. Before that time, and throughout the middle period of his career from the late 20's to the late 30's, Waller's studio work was noteworthy for its consistently high quality.

To be sure, we cannot know whether Waller would have gone on to greater things had he possessed the iron determination found in greater artists. Nor does it matter. What he did (as opposed to what he might have done) was more than enough to earn him a place among the giants of jazz. Of the 675-odd recordings he made between 1922 and 1943, perhaps a third remain irresistibly listenable to this day, not merely for the brilliance of his playing but also for the scapegrace charm of his singing. Few jazz musicians have had a higher batting average.

As for the "serious" compositions Waller never got around to writing, I cannot imagine they would have been more memorable than the life-enhancing records of popular songs he made so casually and in such miraculous profusion, and to which it is impossible to listen without breaking out in the broadest of smiles. To these recordings we can return again and again for the same reasons we revisit a play like Noël Coward's *Hay Fever* or a novel like P.G. Wodehouse's *The Mating Season*. Their inspired craftsmanship and divine frivolity rarely fail to please. "He achieves his effect through the magical transfer of *joie de vivre*," Joseph Epstein once wrote of H.L. Mencken. The same can be said of Fats Waller.

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Books in Review

On Second Thought

America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy

by Francis Fukuyama

Yale. 240 pp. $25.00

Reviewed by
Aaron L. Friedberg

In 1989 Francis Fukuyama wrote an article, "The End of History?," that made him famous. Like George Kennan four decades earlier in "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," another famous article, Fukuyama managed to grasp the essential features of a newly opened chapter in human history before most observers had recognized its existence. His thesis—that liberal democratic capitalism represented the highest form of social development and was destined to spread throughout the world—was embraced by some, attacked (and often misinterpreted) by others, but became overnight an indispensable part of the intellectual toolkit of anyone trying to make sense of the post-cold-war world.

Not content to rest on his laurels, Fukuyama has used the past fifteen years to produce a body of work remarkable for its scope and seriousness. After expanding his article into a book, *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), he turned to such topics as the role of culture in economic growth (*Trust*, 1996), the impact on advanced societies of the movement from industrial to information-based economies (*The Great Disruption*, 2000), and the implications of the biotech revolution (*Our Post-Human Future*, 2003).

Since 9/11 Fukuyama has also returned to foreign affairs, writing on the challenge of fixing failed states (*State Building*, 2004) and launching a new journal, *The American Interest*. In addition, he has emerged as a prominent critic of administration policy in Iraq—as well as of the neoconservative movement of which he has long been considered a part. In this new volume, based on a series of lectures at Yale, he concludes that since "the entire neoconservative agenda" is likely to be discredited by our "perceived failure in Iraq," he himself is ready to "abandon the label and articulate an altogether distinct foreign-policy position." In *America at the Crossroads*, Fukuyama is thus at a juncture of his own.

Before turning to Fukuyama's new doctrine, I should say a word about the controversy his arguments have already aroused. Although he now asserts that he had deep misgivings about the Iraq war before it started, he did not offer any public criticism of it until the spring of 2004, at which point the insurgency was raging and hopes of a quick end to the American occupation had evaporated. Then, instead of seeing U.S. difficulties in Iraq as the result of inadequate planning, bureaucratic bungling, poor early decisions, and/or a measure of bad luck, he contended that the entire enterprise had been misconceived from the beginning. Moreover, while rejecting crude accusations that American policy had been hijacked by a shadowy, pro-Israel, neoconservative (i.e., Jewish) "cabal," Fukuyama drew a crucial connection between

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the pre-war writings of at least some neoconservatives and the Bush administration's ultimate and, in his view, disastrous decision to invade Iraq.

Some of Fukuyama's critics, most notably Charles Krauthammer, have responded by accusing him, in effect, of cowardice, opportunism, and treachery. When the going got tough, they say, he jumped on the antiwar bandwagon, joining the chorus of blame being directed at his longtime intellectual allies and claiming to have known all along that they were wrong. To this Fukuyama has replied in turn that Krauthammer has become an uncritical cheerleader for the Bush administration.

This dispute is unfortunate in purely human terms, and it is also a distraction. Whatever one's views about Iraq then or now, the pressing question before us concerns the principles and goals that should guide American strategy going forward. What is the character of the threats and opportunities we face, and how should we respond to them? While I disagree with him in many respects, Fukuyama has important things to say on these questions, and his views deserve to be taken seriously.

THE STRUCTURE of Fukuyama's book is straightforward. After a largely familiar portrait of the founding fathers of neoconservatism, he seeks to distill "the basic themes or principles of neoconservative thought" on matters of foreign policy. By the end of the cold war, he writes, these constituted a distinct school, differing in important respects from the three leading alternative approaches: liberal internationalism, realism, and what Fukuyama, following Walter Russell Mead, labels "Jacksonian" American nationalism.

Unlike most realists, Fukuyama points out, neoconservatives take the view that "the internal character of regimes matters and that foreign policy must reflect the deepest values of liberal democratic societies." Unlike most liberals, who place their faith in international law and institutions, neoconservatives believe that certain problems can be solved "only through the prudent exercise of [American] power." Finally, neoconservatives harbor a well-founded mistrust of "ambitious social-engineering projects."

In Fukuyama's view, the sudden and largely peaceful collapse of the Soviet empire was an "extraordinary vindication" for the neoconservatives, who in the 1970's and 80's had urged confrontation rather than accommodation and who asserted, correctly as it turned out, that the cold war would end only with the overthrow of Communist regimes across central and eastern Europe. But these events also "laid the groundwork for [a] wrong turn" in the next decade, encouraging many neoconservatives to believe that further dramatic breakthroughs to democracy were imminent in other parts of the world.

Fukuyama is himself, of course, the best-known advocate of the view that the end of the cold war would be followed by the global spread of markets and democratic institutions. Here, however, he describes his position as essentially predictive rather than prescriptive; for him, economic development would lead to the spread of democracy on its own steam and at its own pace. In contrast to this essentially "Marxist" conception, other neoconservatives unfortunately adopted the more "Leninist" stance that "history could be accelerated through American agency" and, in particular, through the application of American military power.

Although he does not directly tag them as such, Fukuyama clearly regards William Kristol and Robert Kagan as the leading "Leninists" of the 1990's. In their hands, the complex, multistranded legacy of neoconservative thought was rendered into something cruder but politically more effective: "the expansive, interventionist, democracy-promoting position that has come to be seen today as the essence of neoconservatism." During the 1990's, these ideas were used to "justify a highly militarized American foreign policy that led logically to the Iraq war."

THE FOUR central chapters of Fukuyama's book are devoted to an examination of the links between the writings of some neoconservative theorists and the misjudgments and errors of the Bush administration. First, just as the neoconservatives "tended to overestimate the level of threat facing the United States" after the end of the cold war—wrongly seeing China, for example, as a looming great-power rival—so they and the Bush administration exaggerated the danger posed by Islamist terrorism, misdiagnosed its root causes and potential cures, and "conflated the threat of nuclear terrorism with the rogue state/proliferation problem." This overestimation caused Bush to make preventive war against a prospective enemy (as opposed to preemptive attack on an enemy getting ready to strike) into a "central feature" of American grand strategy.

But those "mobilized to commit suicide terrorism against the United States" constitute, in Fukuyama's view, "a relatively small number of people," with limited appeal and little chance of seizing political power; the danger they pose should therefore be "manageable." Moreover, while the threat of a mass-casualty terror attack cannot be altogether written off, "there is reason . . . to think that the probability of such an attack has gone down since September 11." Finally, since the most likely candidates for recruitment are not "pious Muslims in the Middle East but alienated and uprooted young people in Hamburg, London, or Amsterdam," spreading democracy in the Middle East "will not be a short-term solution to the problem of terrorism."

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Next, neoconservative arguments in favor of "benevolent American hegemony" combined with the Bush administration's tendency to believe in "its own good motives" to lead it into a second error: the failure to anticipate the "global reaction to the war before undertaking it, particularly in Europe." The United States may, in fact, be different in its goals and behavior from other great powers or empires; but, Fukuyama reminds us, the appeal of "benevolent hegemony rests on a belief in American exceptionalism that most non-Americans simply find not credible."

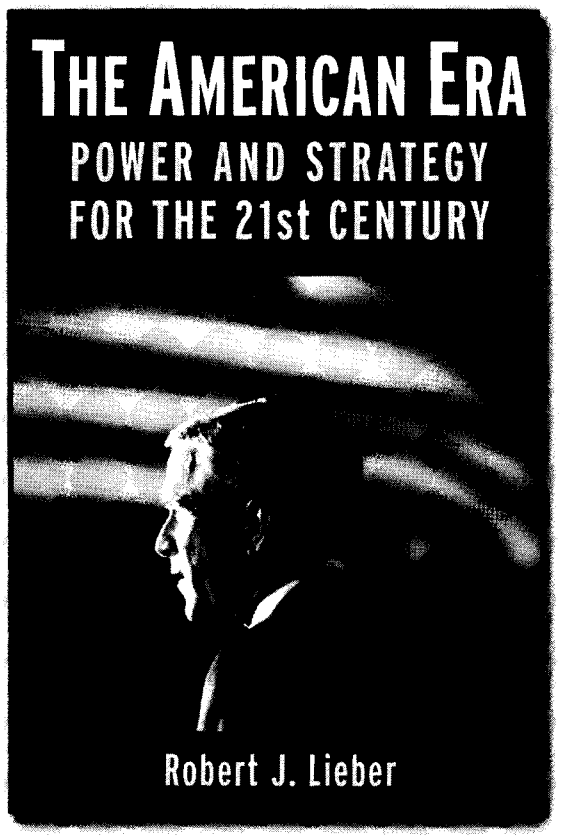
A third set of problems arises out of what Fukuyama describes as a collision between the neoconservatives' belief in the desirability (in some cases) of regime change and their longstanding suspicion of large-scale social engineering. Instead of seeking to resolve this contradiction, the administration and its supporters allowed themselves to be guided by one principle while simply ignoring the other. As a result, they "vastly underestimated the cost and difficulty of reconstructing Iraq and guiding it toward a democratic transition."

A fourth and final set of errors had to do with the alleged failure of both the neoconservatives and the Bush administration to take international institutions seriously. While Fukuyama shares their generally bleak view of the United Nations, he asserts that they have allowed their fear of multilateral constraints, their confidence in their own judgment and rectitude, and their lack of concern for international legitimacy to get the better of them. Despite the neoconservatives' claim to be willing to work with organizations made up of other democracies, they even "rejected" NATO when it failed to fall into line over Iraq. As for the administration, thanks to its aversion to multilateralism it will leave behind "no lasting architecture for addressing problems of world order."

What then of Fukuyama's "altogether distinct" doctrine, which he labels "realistic Wilsonianism"? To this he devotes comparatively little space, but certain general features are plain. First, preventive war and forcible regime change must be understood to be "very extreme measures"; thus, Fukuyama advocates a "dramatic demilitarization of American foreign policy and reemphasis on other types of policy instruments." Analogously, although the United States should continue to "care about what happens inside states around the world," its efforts to promote democracy should rely primarily on the use of "soft power." Finally, the democratization of the Middle East would be a good thing for its own sake (even if it will not solve our terrorism problem);

"This may be the best book on American foreign policy written since Sept. 11."

—Robert Kagan, author of *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*



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but, having lost our moral authority and credibility over Iraq, we will have to cede the task largely to others, especially "alternative international institutions."

In line with this last point, Fukuyama urges the U.S. to encourage the ongoing proliferation of regional and global multilateral mechanisms, including a revitalized NATO, a worldwide community of democracies, and various new security organizations in East Asia. Above all, Washington should seek ways to "downplay its dominance," and be more cautious, "subtle," and "indirect" in its efforts to shape the world.

WHETHER FUKUYAMA has succeeded in devising a distinctive new doctrine is open to question. With perhaps the partial exception of his desire to sideline the UN, the "realistic Wilsonianism" he espouses seems virtually indistinguishable from the mainstream liberal internationalism common in academic circles and among the foreign-policy gurus of the Democratic party.

But novelty is not the main issue here. Whatever its label, a successful post-cold-war, post-9/11, post-Iraq American grand strategy will have to provide clear and persuasive answers to the questions suggested earlier. What are our goals? What are the threats and opportunities we face? Through what mix of means, and what sequence of measures, can we best meet these challenges and achieve our objectives?

Both neoconservatives and liberal internationalists agree that a primary goal of American foreign policy should be to promote the global spread of democracy. Where they differ is on the prominence and priority to be accorded this objective. Since the end of the cold war, most liberals have tended to believe that the impersonal forces unleashed by economic globalization would eventually draw even the toughest and most distasteful holdouts toward political liberalization. In the meantime, they caution that making too much of regime differences risks challenging the legitimacy and sovereign equality of non-democratic members of the "international community," thereby undermining prospects for cooperation and the all-important work of institution-building.

Neoconservatives, generally more impatient, have been inclined instead to draw sharp distinctions between democratic and non-democratic states. For them, authoritarian regimes are not merely distasteful but demonstrably unreliable and untrustworthy. This, rather than simple animus, is why most neoconservatives are deeply skeptical of

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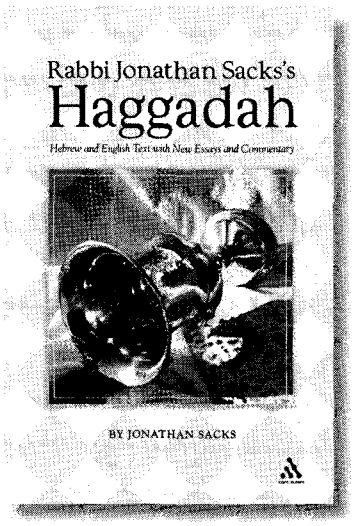

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the notion that a China ruled by the Communist party can ever become a true "strategic partner," or that the present leaders of North Korea and Iran can be relied on to live up to paper commitments to abandon nuclear weapons. Regime change may not be around the corner in any of these places, but until it comes, the prospects for genuine cooperation will be severely limited.

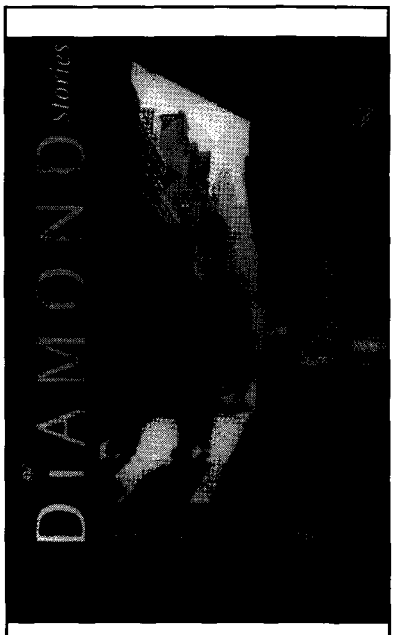
The lesson the neoconservatives drew from the collapse of the Soviet Union was not that change would necessarily be easy but that it was possible, even in places where most experts did not believe it to be and where many warned that change would be more dangerous than a continuation of the status quo. To the neoconservatives, finding ways actively to encourage the further spread of democracy has thus been a matter both of urgency and of strategic (as well as moral) importance. The United States has an essential role to play in this process; no other nation or international grouping can be expected to take the lead.

Time is of the essence. Especially if America is at or near the peak of its ability to influence events, it must use its advantages wisely while it has them. If liberalization does not take hold in the Middle East, the threat of militant Islam will only grow. And elsewhere, too, reversals are all too imaginable. A continued constriction of freedom in Russia will transform that country finally into a corrupt, unstable, and hypernationalist dictatorship equipped with vast energy reserves and a large stockpile of nuclear weapons and driven by revanchist dreams. If reform remains blocked in China, the United States will find itself facing an authoritarian competitor of unprecedented wealth, military power, and technological dynamism. The further spread of democracy is therefore not just an outcome devoutly to be wished, it must be a central goal of American strategy.

In his assessment of the "post-9/11 threat environment," Fukuyama has little to say about such potential great-power challenges. Nor does he have much advice on how to prevent rogue states from acquiring weapons of mass destruction. Duly noting that the nuclearization of the Middle East would add "a huge new element of danger to one of the world's most unstable regions," he contents himself with warning against the dangers of preemption. He offers no suggestions as to how the United States can persuade or frighten others into joining it in applying the sort of intense, omnidirectional pressure that might stand some chance of compelling Iran (or North Korea) to abandon its nuclear ambitions.

Has the Bush administration overestimated the threat of jihadists armed with weapons of mass destruction? Even as he concedes that "there is no methodology that allows us to come to agreement on the scope of this threat," Fukuyama believes the answer is yes. Unfortunately, however, the extent of the threat is not a function of the size of the jihadist movement. That, as he suggests, there may only be thousands rather than millions of people willing to commit acts of unprecedented barbarism against the United States and its allies provides scant comfort. Nor does the fact that active jihadists represent a tiny fraction of the Islamic world mean that they are incapable of seizing power in countries that have nuclear weapons (Pakistan) or the resources to buy them (Saudi Arabia).

Fukuyama is confident that the increased resources we have devoted since 9/11 to the threat of nuclear weapons in the hands of terrorists must surely have reduced the level of danger. This optimism is probably misplaced. True, we are not yet at the point where rogue states supply nuclear weapons to terrorists. But if Iran and North Korea are permitted to pass safely across the nuclear finish line, we will likely be a great deal closer. It



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would be ironic if the events of the last several years were to cause us to lower our guard at precisely the moment when the threat might actually be growing—ironic, and potentially catastrophic. And this is to say nothing of the danger of biological weapons or the potentially enormous disruptive effects of repeated "conventional" attacks on the scale of 9/11 or the Madrid and London bombings.

THE BULK of Fukuyama's criticism of neoconservative thinking and administration policy is focused less on ends or threats than on the issue of means. Although, in its details, Fukuyama's analysis can be nuanced, he seems in general to endorse the crude caricature of an administration and its "Leninist" backers obsessed with the use of military power and committed to "an open-ended doctrine of regime change and preventive war." One is left with the impression that, had it not run into difficulties in Iraq, the Bush administration would now be using force to topple one dictatorship after another, spreading democracy throughout the Middle East at the point of a sword.

If there are individuals who have held such views, I have never met them, either in or out of government. Nor is it the case that either the administration or its supporters were ever as reflexively unilateralist, or as dismissive of "soft power," diplomacy, or international institutions as they are routinely made out to be. Fukuyama is no doubt correct that the last several years have underscored the importance of consulting closely with allies, cultivating the perception that one's actions are legitimate, revitalizing the conduct of public diplomacy, and rethinking the structure of international institutions. But these, again, are means, not ends in themselves, and they are far less likely to be effective if they are not backed by American military power and the demonstrated willingness, where necessary, to use it. Without hard power behind it, soft power turns quickly to mush.

Following the appearance of "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" in 1947, George Kennan spent much of the rest of his career arguing that he had been misunderstood, and that others had wrongheadedly militarized the doctrine of containment he sketched there. Whether he was misread or not is a matter of debate. What is undeniable is that Kennan himself, having with great prescience identified the goal and the broad outlines of American cold-war grand strategy, recoiled from the means necessary to attain it. It would be a pity if Francis Fukuyama came to resemble him in this respect as well.

A la française

American Vertigo: Traveling America in the Footsteps of Tocqueville

by Bernard-Henri Lévy

Random House. 308 pp. $24.95

Reviewed by
Brian C. Anderson

BACK IN 2004, with an eye to the growing rift between the United States and France in the aftermath of the war in Iraq, the *Atlantic Monthly* commissioned the French philosopher, journalist, and filmmaker Bernard-Henri Lévy to spend a year traveling America and writing up his impressions. With a film crew and assistants in tow, Lévy followed the path set down 173 years earlier by his great predecessor, Alexis de Tocqueville, whose *Democracy in America* remains perhaps the most influential book ever written about the U.S. The five prolix articles that resulted, running throughout 2005 in the *Atlantic*, now form the core of *American Vertigo*, Lévy's attempt to take the pulse of our democracy.

Lévy would seem in many ways a sensible choice to carry out a mission of cross-cultural understanding. The dashing, media-savvy fifty-seven-year old—"BHL," as he is known in France, where he has enjoyed rock-star-like fame since the publication three decades ago of his fiery anti-Marxist polemic, *Barbarism with a Human Face*—has long held a friendly, if hardly uncritical, view of America. This affection has set him apart from the run of left-wing Parisian intellectuals, for whom virulent anti-Americanism has become second nature. Lévy has even taken to describing himself as an "anti-anti-American." Also to his credit, he has recognized the menace posed by radical Islam to the West, supporting the U.S. war to topple the Taliban in Afghanistan. Though opposed to the intervention in Iraq, he has made his case on prudential grounds and avoided the moral preening of other European critics.

American Vertigo ignited controversy from the moment it hit U.S. bookstores in late January, thanks to a startlingly nasty front-page notice in the *New York Times Book Review* by Garrison Keillor. Denouncing the book as "the classic Freaks, Fatties, Fanatics & Faux Culture Excursion beloved of European journalists for the past 50 years," Keillor let Lévy know that his oh-so-French musings on America were not welcome: "Thanks for coming. Don't let the door hit you on the way out." The *New Republic*'s editor-in-chief Martin Peretz swiftly rallied to Lévy's defense, claiming that Keillor was too dull-witted to appreciate the Frenchman's insightful and often sympa-

BRIAN C. ANDERSON *is senior editor of* City Journal *and the author of* South Park Conservatives: The Revolt Against Liberal Media Bias.

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thetic portrait of the American experiment, a view echoed by the critic Christopher Hitchens. Subsequent responses to the book have been equally divided, from "brilliant" and "dazzling" to "rotten" and "insufferable." Amid these extremes, where to find the real BHL?

As Keillor grumpily charged, Lévy does in fact spend a lot of time complaining about what he considers the vices of American democracy, with vulgar materialism leading the way. A 17,000-member Christian church in Illinois, looking more like a bank than a house of worship, repulses him, not because it offends his atheism but because its banal "good-guy God," he believes, robs religion of any transcendence or grandeur. The horde of shoppers at the gargantuan Mall of America in Minneapolis reminds him in turn of Tocqueville's prophecy of a new kind of democratic despotism that keeps citizens in a state of sheep-like contentedness, caring for their needs but robbing them of liberty. Much of what Lévy sees—from gas-guzzling SUV's to acres of parking lots to sprawling cities like Los Angeles—seems "obese" to him, out of proportion to any properly human scale.

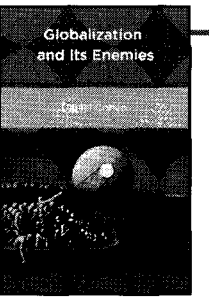
Even more troubling for American democracy, Lévy maintains, is the rise of "neo-puritanism." An obsession with proper sexual behavior shows up not only in the "pestilential practices" of the Moral Majority, he observes, but even where one would never expect it. In a San Francisco sex club, for example, he lingers over a scolding sign: NO UPROARIOUS OR LOUD LAUGHTER. CONDOMS OBLIGATORY. TURN ALL CELL PHONES OFF. IF SOMEONE SAYS NO TO YOU, PLEASE DO NOT INSIST. Interviewing Joan Blades, co-founder of MoveOn.org, Lévy learns that the left-wing group first emerged in the 1990's to derail the Republican effort to impeach then-President Bill Clinton, and that its original name was "Censure and Move On." Even American radicals, he laments, believed that Clinton deserved moral censure for the mere seduction of an intern!

Most disturbing of all, however, is the American tolerance for social and economic injustice. How can Americans allow once prosperous cities like Buffalo and Detroit to crumble into "modern ruins," inhabited mostly by desperate minorities and the homeless? Though Lévy acknowledges that the U.S. has a social safety net of sorts, he deems it utterly insufficient. As for America's prisons and jails, they serve solely to exclude wrongdoers, most of them poor, from normal society, rather than to rehabilitate them, as a humane penal system should. And, of course, he shudders at the fact that some states still embrace the death penalty.

But not all of Lévy's impressions are so gloomy. He comes away pleasantly surprised by students at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, who are anything but the war-loving barbarians that the European Left might lead one to expect. In Dearborn, Michigan, he meets prosperous pro-American Muslim immigrants and contrasts them favorably with the alienated Islamists of the French suburbs, who "shit on the [French] flag and hiss at the national anthem" and among whom "hatred for the country that has taken them in is equaled only by an anti-Semitism eager to shift into action."

Nor are all U.S. cities dead zones. Seattle in particular dazzles him, its "non-conformism" symbolizing the modern America that he truly admires—the nation of 1960's revolt, of literary experimentation, of personal liberty. It is the tension between this America and the one of capitalist banality, religious fundamentalism, and injustice that gives Lévy his "vertigo."

Since Lévy's sojourn coincided with the 2004 presidential race, he



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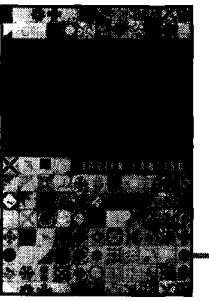

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freely offers his opinions on American politics, suggesting that President Bush and Republicans in general are to blame for the darkness that he sees spreading throughout the country. Hobnobbing with the actress Sharon Stone, one of countless celebrities he encounters, Lévy nods affirmatively as she splutters: "The problem is Bush. That ignoramus, that loser, that guy you'd hardly even want to go out for a beer with, who ends up President." The people who most impressed him during his journey, his "heroes," are all liberals, some pretty long in the tooth: Morris Dees, Norman Mailer, Woody Allen, Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama.

But Lévy is also no pushover for the American Left. Too many American liberals, he complains, irresponsibly downplay the terrorist threat, and bring discredit on themselves by drawing an outrageous moral equivalence between America and its Islamist enemies. As for the Democratic party, it is a "black hole," obsessed with fundraising but bereft of ideas. Though he does not agree with the neoconservatives, several of whom—including Richard Perle and William Kristol—he spars with in *American Vertigo*, Lévy credits them with at least *having* ideas.

AT ITS best, *American Vertigo* boasts some inspired writing and vignettes, like Lévy's acid portrait of the Indian activist Russell Means, who turns out to be a spiteful anti-Semite, and an evocative description of pre-Katrina New Orleans. Still, like the *Atlantic* series on which it is based, the book often feels bloated and disjointed, held together by little more than Lévy's enormous ego.

Indeed, the book frequently seems more about BHL in America than about America itself. The self-obsession can be comedic, as when Lévy cannot fathom why John Kerry—pilloried during the 2004 campaign for his European air—keeps putting off a meeting. Do Kerry's handlers not realize who he is? A veteran journalist finally pulls Lévy aside and gives it to him straight: "You're French. You're as French as a bottle of Evian or an Hermès tie"—the last kind of person Kerry wanted to be seen with. Sure enough, when Lévy eventually gets his interview, he praises Kerry's "European" sophistication.

This reaction points to the deeper problem with *American Vertigo*: Lévy's inability to free himself from his own prejudices as a *bien-pensant* European leftist. His relative sobriety on terrorism and his refusal to demonize the United States are welcome, as far as they go. But it remains astonishing that this is what a *friend* of America—and Lévy has actually come under fire in France for being too kind to the U.S., even for being a "neoconservative"—looks like in the intellectual milieu of today's Europe. His sympathy for American democracy extends only to those aspects of it that, to his mind, reflect continental beliefs and sensibilities. Not all Americans, he reassures his readers, are fat, money-grubbing, gun-loving racists and reactionaries.

Lévy's parochialism is nowhere more evident than when he offers the Democrats a new platform to propel the party back into power, including a renewed commitment to Enlightenment rationalism against religious fundamentalism and a "new New Deal" of massive government programs for the poor. Does Lévy really think that transforming the Democrats into European-style social democrats would appeal to Americans? Taking such advice could only drive the party deeper into the political wilderness.

This myopia makes an especially dramatic contrast with the example of Lévy's famed forebear, Tocqueville. The French aristocrat came to our shores open to what the American experiment in democracy could teach France, especially about preserving liberty in an age of equality. But BHL never troubles to consider what the American model—with its vigorous market economy, social mobility, and respect for religious faith—might offer to statist and relentlessly secularist Europe, with its stagnant welfare economies and alienated and increasingly radicalized Muslims. Like so many literary travelers before him, Lévy came to America and found only himself.

Out of Order

My Life Among the Deathworks: Illustrations of the Aesthetics of Authority

by Philip Rieff

University of Virginia Press. 234 pp. $34.95

Reviewed by
Michael J. Lewis

FORTY YEARS ago, in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, the sociologist Philip Rieff described the predicament of modern culture in terms so comprehensive, spacious, and authoritative that they were swiftly detached from their author to become part of the general understanding of things. Many who do not know Rieff's name—including even most well-educated people under fifty, I suspect—or those who know it only because of his turbulent early marriage to Susan Sontag will recognize the general line of his argument. It is that, ever since Freud, the psychological understanding of man has displaced every other understanding.

Instead of being guided by an

MICHAEL J. LEWIS *is the author of* American Art and Architecture, *to be published next month by Thames & Hudson. His "Art for Sale" appeared in the March* COMMENTARY.

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overarching structure of authoritative values, Rieff wrote, and instead of striving for "some communal superior end," modern culture was rapidly reaching a state in which atomized individuals pursued in isolation their personal sense of well-being. The consequences of this were devastating not only for religion—which modernity had decided it could do without—but for politics of any sort. As Rieff had put it in an earlier study of Freud, "No politics can be very ardent once the psychological man discovers how symptomatically he is acting"—discovers, that is, that public activity for the sake of some ostensibly noble goal is merely a reflection of inner wants that can and should be satisfied by other means.

Like all of Rieff's work, *Triumph* was a difficult book, and however quickly its title became a catchphrase, one may doubt that many made their way through it or absorbed the thorough bleakness of its vision. To some young radical academics, indeed, imbued with the spirit of the times, Rieff seemed one of *them*, his highly nuanced and basically conservative critique of Freud all too adaptable to the late-60's campaign to "question authority" of every kind. Rieff himself gradually withdrew from public life soon thereafter, publishing nothing since 1973.

Instead, he concentrated on his teaching at the University of Pennsylvania, where both his lecturing and his sartorial style (the latter of which might be described as Savile Row, *anno* 1925) made him a campus legend. Now, at the age of eighty-two, he has published *My Life Among the Deathworks*, which is dedicated to Sontag and in which the psychological focus of his earlier works has been widened to take in literary and artistic culture, and much else besides.

This, too, is an exceptionally demanding book, and will likely win Rieff few new friends. Which is a great pity, for it is a specimen of a type of sociology that has fallen from fashion: an attempt to ask the largest possible questions about the meaning of society and its institutions.

The focus in this new book is on culture as an instrument not of personal expression (as in *Triumph*) but of social order. For Rieff, every such order, whether it is an aboriginal band of hunter-gatherers or a high technological civilization, is predicated upon a "sacred order": that is, a universe of meaning from which society derives its authority—internally, so as to give force to its rules and interdictions, and externally, so as to assert its validity against competing universes of meaning. But since a sacred order is something intangible, it can only sustain a social order if it first assumes palpable, visible form. Such forms constitute what we know as culture, an "arrangement or order of words, images, bodies" comprising what Rieff designates, in the subtitle of his book, "the aesthetics of authority."

But not every work of literature or art upholds the authority of the sacred order; some can also serve to undermine it. For a century or so, the most celebrated ones have been of the latter category. These Rieff refers to as "deathworks," his term (he is a great coiner of terms) for a work of art that poses "an all-out assault upon something vital to the established culture."

Not all deathworks are necessarily bad art. They include some of the works that Rieff most admires, such as Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* and James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. In these the assault on sacred order is veiled and oblique, and couched in exquisite form. But in others the assault is explicit and purposeful, as in some of the coarser images shown by Rieff: Andres Serrano's

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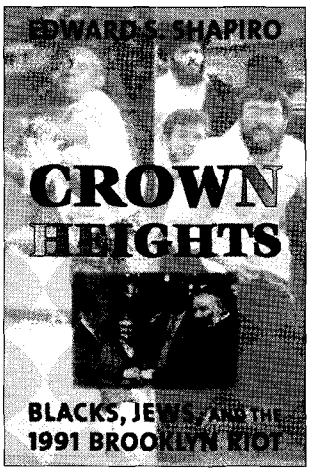

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notorious urine-immersed crucifix; the Italian artist who canned and labeled his own feces; Robert Mapplethorpe's photographic self-portrait in the act of buggering himself with a bullwhip.

If a social order has no binding authority other than that provided by culture, what to make of a society whose most celebrated cultural objects are deathworks? The outlook, for Rieff, is not good. We are now moving into what he dubs the third in a series of world cultures. The first world, that of primitive and pagan society, was ruled by fate and ordered by taboos; the second, that of the great monotheistic religions, was ruled by faith and ordered by commandments. The third world presents something new under the sun: a social order that rests on no preexisting sacred order, and whose cultural artifacts serve mainly to transgress, debunk, or deconstruct. Here Rieff sees the career of Freud as one long extended deathwork in itself. By promulgating the psychological understanding of man, Freud, in this reading, helped to demolish the sacred order of the second world without creating a new one in its place—indeed, Freud made the creation of any new sacred order nearly impossible.

SUCH IS the framework of this book, much of which is given over to a whirling procession of "image entries" where Rieff discusses a book or painting in terms of its transgressive relationship to social order. This is not straightforward formal analysis, of the literary or art-historical sort. From a mention of an image of drowning in Peter Weir's 1977 film *The Last Wave*, for example, Rieff might jump to Freudian theory, from there to the "pre-Raphaelite" depiction of the drowned Ophelia in Lawrence Olivier's *Hamlet*, and from there to Primo Levi's writings on Auschwitz—all in the space of a single paragraph. Well aware of the peculiarity of his approach, Rieff defends it as "Ezra Pound's ideogrammic method, in which meanings are allowed to arise from juxtapositions."

At times these juxtapositions can be poignant, or painful. Thus, Rieff pairs a famous photograph of the fall of the Warsaw ghetto, with its tragic image of a boy, dressed in a cap and knickers, raising his hands in surrender, with a photograph of himself at roughly the same age, already a fashionable dandy but bearing a clear resemblance to the boy in Warsaw. This capacity for imaginative identification with images and symbols is Rieff at his best, and it reflects the long process of maturation that underpins this book, many of whose episodes and motifs were clearly first created and then refined in the classroom.

Or, in some cases, over-refined. Here and there Rieff seems to be drawing upon ancient classroom gambits, somewhat cracked and hardened with the years and unchecked lately for accuracy. (He occasionally mangles his German, for instance: the translation of Hamlet's most famous line is actually *Sein oder nicht sein*, not, as Rieff gives it, *Zu zein oder nicht zu zein*.) It is surprising these were not caught, but Rieff's prodigious learning may have intimidated his editors just as it will surely alienate many a reader.

The compacted density of Rieff's prose and imagery is something of which he seems proud, insisting that a "thick text is an enduring cultural achievement, like a cathedral." Yet, to succeed, such a style requires a certain amount of good will from the reader, and a readiness to be carried along by Rieff's vaulting leaps. For many who embark on the journey even with the best of intentions, those generous impulses will likely evaporate along the way.

Others will disembark for reasons political. It is barely conceivable that a somewhat less provocative version of this book could receive a respectful hearing in establishment circles, but Rieff seems utterly indifferent to praise or favor, and even appears to have gone out of his way to make sure he would not get any. In short order, he attacks the culture of legalized abortion ("an odorless flush-away world indifferent to life"), politicized homosexuality ("a movement of hate and indifference"), and black America (distinguished by "a bizarre and sudden visibility of Jew-hatred"). This disdain for the symbols of progressive piety is so thoroughgoing and explicit that one must conclude Rieff either relishes the confrontation or simply no longer cares. He seems to have determined to state his case in terms as pungent as possible before retreating to the cultural catacombs to await the final advent of the third world culture.

AMERICAN SOCIOLOGY has long been divided into a qualitative and a quantitative lobe, of which the quantitative, applying statistical methods and empirical analysis to those questions that can be subjected to numbers and polls, is now largely dominant. But the qualitative lobe is the one that asks the questions that matter. What is the essential shape of society? What holds it together and what makes it fray? What is the place of the individual in the collective?

At present, such questions tend to be asked only by scholars who approach them through the sterile lenses of race, class, and gender. It is highly ironic, a prominent sociologist told me recently, that certain "progressive" young scholars, who have long held Rieff's academic iconoclasm in high regard, "now pose the greatest threat to any hope of restoring the sociological imagination." Was it to sever his last bonds of affection with his chosen field that Rieff added the studied provocations that season this quirky, irritating, and frequently profound book? Like its author, *My Life Among the Deathworks* is a living fossil of a kind of inquiry that has largely vanished.

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Divine Arts

Kabbalah: A Very Short Introduction

by Joseph Dan

Oxford. 130 pp. $18.95

Reviewed by
Benjamin Balint

In the 2005 movie *Bee Season*, Richard Gere plays a professor of kabbalah who lectures on the mystical repair of the world and employs an obscure technique of meditation on Hebrew letters to train his daughter for spelling competitions. At the Jerusalem premiere, I overheard a moviegoer expressing her amazement at the ease with which one of the world's most arcane systems of thought has been appropriated by popular culture. "I can't believe such a thing is coming out of Hollywood," she said.

Given the vogue of kabbalah among pop celebrities, I was surprised by her surprise. Roseanne Barr has reported that kabbalah "helped me to totally reconfigure my entire being." In *Us Weekly*, Britney Spears got herself photographed brandishing a kabbalistic manual poolside. Madonna (a/k/a "Esther"), a devotee of a controversial Los Angeles-based outfit known as the Kabbalah Center, came to Israel in September 2004 to visit a mystic's grave and on her most recent world tour wore a kabbalistic red string bracelet and a T-shirt with the slogan, "Kabbalists Do It Better."

Amid all the trendiness, one almost hesitates to ask the essential question: what *is* kabbalah? Joseph Dan of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, who has reflected on the subject for some 50 years, offers a fascinating reply in his new book.

Benjamin Balint, *who lives in Jerusalem, is associate editor of* Azure. *His review of Simon Goldhill's* The Temple of Jerusalem *appeared in the September 2005* Commentary.

Kabbalah, which literally means "that which has been received," refers broadly to a "hidden" doctrine that (along with the "Written" and "Oral" Torah) is said to have been given by God to Moses at Sinai and to have been privately transmitted ever since, often only in hints and allusions, from master to disciple. Throughout the medieval period and well into the early modern age, traditionalists took these teachings very seriously, although they were also regarded as an inherently dangerous subject matter that could lead all but a select few into heresy or madness. In later, post-Enlightenment times, many scholars and religious progressives came to consider these teachings a form of superstitious nonsense. Only in the last hundred years or so has kabbalah become a subject of academic study.

Dan's book thus represents the fruit of a century's worth of research and systematic analysis, much of it centered at the Hebrew University. Exquisitely attuned to the varied schools, streams, and shades of his subject, Dan begins on a note of caution: although the term "kabbalah" has never been so widely used as it is today, even in the past it did not have a single meaning. Having warned us that "there is no 'kabbalah' in the singular," he proceeds to give us a nuanced chronological survey of kabbalah in the plural.

Although both the Bible and early rabbinic literature contain passages of clearly mystical import, kabbalah proper first emerged at the end of the 12th century, at the very moment when Jewish rationalist philosophy was reaching its own height in the writings of Moses Maimonides and others. The golden age of medieval kabbalah followed shortly thereafter, finding its supreme expression in the great Aramaic-language compendium of myth and mysticism known as the Zohar. Composed in Christian Spain by Moses de Leon in the last decades of the 13th century, but ascribed by him to the 2nd-century sage Shimon bar Yochai, the Zohar's volumes combine a homiletic commentary on the Torah, the Song of Songs, and the book of Ruth with stories of the spiritual adventures of bar Yochai and his disciples as they wander about the ancient Holy Land.

In Dan's persuasive judgment, this eclectic mélange is "among the most daring and radical works of religious literature and mysticism in any language." At the center of its vision is an elaborate symbolic latticework made up of the *sefirot*, the ten divine attributes or emanations. Following Dan's suggestion, one can think of these dynamically, as representing a progressive unfolding of the unknowable and transcendent God into a knowable, immanent divine presence—God's layered manifestation of Himself to humanity.

What most intrigues Dan in this scheme, however, is that the *sefirot* themselves, although they partake of the divine, are susceptible of becoming aligned or misaligned according to the actions of human beings. In the Zohar's theurgy, Jewish ritual grants to mortals the power to influence the divine realm. Thus, observing the laws of Sabbath with the proper intention is not just a dutiful means of demonstrating a Jew's loyalty to God's covenant, let alone an exercise in time-management, but an act that, by bringing harmony to the *sefirot*, allows divine energy to flow through them and thereby to sustain the lower world. Prayer, to take another example, can be seen as not just an expression of religious feeling, or an institutionalized way of praising God, but as an instrument for actually influencing the divine spheres.

The notion that ritual can make something *happen* leads to this book's first major theme. Because kabbalah considered the fate of the higher world to hinge on the strict fulfillment of religious law in the

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lower, it could exert at once an intensely radical and a deeply conservative force within Jewish life. On the one hand, the kabbalists invented a new Jewish mythology, shaped a new Jewish theology, and, in Dan's words, gave "the mundane, daily rituals a magnificent new dimension of meaning." On the other hand, as firm believers in the revelation of those rituals and all the other commandments of Torah at Sinai, they legitimately regarded their esoteric wisdom not as supplanting but as enhancing the exoteric tradition. After all, as one medieval kabbalist put it, "there is nothing new that is not found in the Torah."

This insistence of the classical kabbalists on strict adherence to Jewish law and ritual would lead to certain historical ironies. In the post-Enlightenment world, precisely this feature of kabbalah would render the entire system suspect, or worse, in the eyes of Jewish religious innovators eager to escape altogether from the orbit of Orthodox practice. In the meantime, Christian philosophers, who began to take a keen interest in the kabbalah during the Renaissance, had already sloughed off such "particularist" aspects of its teachings in favor of something more "universal." Indeed, the notion of kabbalah encapsulated in works like *De Arte Kabbalistica* (1517) and *Kabbala Denudata* (1684) was, in Dan's view, a direct precursor of today's New Age dabblings in commitment-free "kabbalistic" spirituality.

DAN'S SECOND theme emerges from his analysis of how later Jewish mystics made kabbalah a commentary not only on sacred texts and religious tradition but also on history. Here the main protagonists are the kabbalists who flourished in 16th-century Safed, a hill town in Galilee. Led by masters like Joseph Karo, Shlomo Alkabetz, Moshe Cordovero, and especially Isaac Luria (to whom Madonna has devoted a track on her latest album), the Safed or "Lurianic" kabbalists reimagined the *sefirot* as ten "vessels" that, at the moment of God's creation of the world, were unable to contain the immense flow of divine energy. The seven lower vessels broke, trapping divine sparks in their shards. To the Safed kabbalists, the purpose of human life is to fix these vessels—a process called *tikkun* whose end goal is to free all the divine sparks to rejoin God and restore the original whole.

The idea of *tikkun* makes everyone a protagonist in redemption, since every pious act on earth releases a spark. In this sense, the concept is of a piece with the essential conservatism of prior forms of kabbalah. Although, as Dan writes, the concepts and terms of Lurianic kabbalah may seem "strange or even heretical," the "practical message"—namely, conforming one's will and one's deeds to the will of the Creator—"is an ultra-Orthodox one."

But there is another aspect to Lurianic kabbalah. A reinterpretation of the notion of salvation, it was even more deeply a myth of exile. It asked Jews, still reeling from the geographic and spiritual fragmentation that followed their banishment from Spain in 1492, to recognize their exiled condition not just as a punishment for Israel's sins but as a *necessary* scattering of a people that had been tasked with redeeming the world, or perhaps even the "exiled" God Himself. In the early modern period, this cluster of ideas became the (hidden) engine of some of the strongest impulses in Jewish national experience.

Because it offered an explanation of exile, Lurianic kabbalah "did not remain in the domain of small closed groups" like its medieval forebear. Rather, it "penetrated all aspects of Jewish culture," becoming what Dan calls "the dominant spiritual doctrine of the Jewish people." But by putting an end to the taboo on teaching kabbalah to all but elite initiates, this move from the private into the public domain also triggered a dangerous proliferation, setting the stage in the mid-17th century for the spectacular rise and cataclysmic fall of the messianic pretender Shabbetai Zvi. Heralded by a Lurianic kabbalist as the long-awaited redeemer of the Jews, and widely believed to be the only man who could achieve *tikkun* on behalf of his exiled co-religionists, Shabbetai Zvi instead converted to Islam in 1666.

But there remained another turn of the spiral. Within a little more than a century, the idea of a charismatic, indispensable spiritual guide would become a central doctrine of Hasidism—a movement that would sweep like wildfire through the traditional Jewish communities of Eastern Europe and eventually achieve mainstream status. Much as the kabbalah of Safed had been fed by the intensely apocalyptic mood created by the expulsion of Jews from Spain, the revivified kabbalah of Hasidism grew from the wrenching spiritual turbulence created by Sabbateanism.

On this note, with the transfiguration of esotericism into mass religious experience and the effective culmination of kabbalistic thought, Joseph Dan's narrative more or less ends.

IN WEAVING together the various kabbalahs with a fine attention to "how system into system runs," Dan has given us the best concise history of Jewish mysticism. This should come as no surprise. Dan is the preeminent heir of the formidable scholar Gershom Scholem (1897-1982), who founded the academic study of kabbalah at the Hebrew University. In many ways, indeed, his brief book follows along the lines of Scholem's magisterial *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1954). The difference is that where Scholem's emphasis tends to fall on the revolutionary and even the antinomian implications of kabbalistic thought, Dan, as we have seen, is at pains to show how and where the

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kabbalists preserved normative Judaism even as they remade it.

Kabbalah is especially valuable for getting us to ask the right questions. Three in particular arise from Dan's treatment but go well beyond it.

First, there is the matter of kabbalah as a reading of Jewish history. Dan accepts Scholem's contention that Lurianic ideas were conditioned by the trauma of 1492, that they prepared the soil for Sabbateanism, and that this heresy in turn lent to 18th-century Hasidism its core concept of the *rebbe* as a superhuman intercessor. Some scholars today, however, preeminently Moshe Idel, deny any strong causal connection between the Jews' mysticism and their history. Although the arguments of the revisionists are far from incontrovertible, they do alert us to the sometimes treacherous inclination of historians to discern orderly relations where none may exist.

A second question relates to contemporary needs and impulses. It is true enough that Hollywood not only trivializes kabbalah but inverts its singular character, turning it into another, wholly undemanding avenue of "personal growth." But is this just one more example of an easy American syncretism, a lazy reaching for the low-hanging fruit of whatever religious tradition happens to be at hand? Or is there something about kabbalah as a particular *Jewish* system that attracts these spiritual seekers? And if so, what is it?

A final question concerns the wider intellectual legacy of kabbalah. Whether or not it is still a living force among Jewish believers—for the most part, it is not—what of benefit can be derived from its vestiges? How are we to go about understanding and taking the measure of the writings, the personalities, and the ideas, large and small, that are at its heart?

This is a question to which no simple answer can be given. To those with a literary or aesthetic bent, kabbalah surely offers compelling witness to what William Blake termed "the Divine Arts of Imagination." But there is more to it than that. The Zohar, the hasidic tales, the Golem, the legend of the thirty-six unknown just men upon whom rests the fate of the world, the angels and archangels, the demon Samael and his bride Lilith, the Sabbath-eve hymns, the doctrine of divine sparks and of *tikkun*, the propositions that the Torah is one long name of God, that every biblical verse is capable of infinite interpretation, that language in its purest form (i.e., Hebrew) is the very stuff of creation and revelation—each and every one of these expressions of kabbalah has been host to, and felt the creative impress of, the vital spirit of Judaism. As a "very short introduction" to this sublime treasure house, Joseph Dan's book is warmly recommended.

Guesswork

Spying on the Bomb: American Nuclear Intelligence from Nazi Germany to Iran and North Korea

By Jeffrey T. Richelson

Norton. 608 pp. $34.95

Reviewed by
Patrick J. Garrity

In February 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell went before the United Nations Security Council and laid out the case for using force against Saddam Hussein. The stakes were extraordinary. The United States wanted to do more than remove a megalomaniacal despot with a history of violating UN resolutions and developing and using weapons of mass destruction. In the aftermath of September 11, the Bush administration was seeking to create a domestic and international consensus for dealing vigorously with an emerging nexus: rogue states like Iraq, international terrorists, and weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear ones.

Powell's presentation relied heavily on highly classified information, including overhead photographs, communications intercepts, defector reports, and evidence of clandestine purchases of banned equipment. It all pointed to a single conclusion—namely, that "Saddam Hussein [was] determined to get his hands on a nuclear bomb."

As we now know, this assessment was not supported by facts on the ground, or at least by the facts discovered on the ground by coalition forces after the 2003 invasion. The full story of the misjudgment remains something of a mystery, though. As it turned out, the intelligence community had actually been divided over the interpretation of several critical bits of evidence, including the notorious high-strength aluminum tubes supposedly obtained by Iraq for use in nuclear centrifuges. If the CIA exaggerated the Iraqi nuclear threat, it may have had something to do with the fact that it had *under*estimated the scope of Saddam Hussein's nuclear program a decade earlier on the eve of the first Gulf war. Whatever the cause of the lapse, the United States is now saddled with the burden of restoring the credibility of its intelligence agencies just as Iranian and North Korean nuclear ambitions are leading us into competing crises.

In *Spying on the Bomb*, Jeffrey T. Richelson seeks to aid our understanding of these high-stakes challenges by tracing the U.S. nuclear-detection effort from its origins during World War II to the present. A senior fellow at the National Secu-

Patrick J. Garrity, *a new contributor, is a research associate at the Miller Center of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville.*

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rity Archive, a non-profit research organization in Washington D.C., Richelson is one of a small group of scholars who specialize in mining diverse unclassified sources to present a credible, and often critical, picture of the U.S. security establishment. He puts his expertise to use in this book by providing a detailed look at how the United States has tried, with mixed results, to pry loose information about the most sensitive of the military crown jewels of foreign countries.

RICHELSON adopts a case-study approach that focuses on the early stages of nuclear-weapons programs—that is, the development and testing of the bomb itself but not of associated delivery systems like missiles. First, he analyzes our experience with what might be termed global threats—Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China. Second, he considers the programs of two major independent powers, France and India. Third, he examines what he calls the "pariah states" of Israel, South Africa, and Taiwan. Finally, there are the rogues: Iraq, Pakistan, Libya, North Korea, and Iran.

As Richelson's diverse studies show, gaining and making sense of nuclear intelligence is an extremely complex task, with adversaries and even some friends being engaged in extensive denial and deception. To break through the veil of secrecy, the U.S. has had to field a wide range of resources. The menu comprises human assets of various sorts (spies, defectors, refugees, scientists, former nuclear workers); assistance from foreign-intelligence agencies and international organizations; and the careful analysis of open sources (newspapers, journals, and the like). At its technical core, moreover, the U.S. program is driven by a dazzling array of detectors carried on foot, in the sky, in space, underground, and undersea, constantly probing for the telltale physical traces of nuclear-weapons activity.

But even when the U.S. succeeds in collecting data about a particular foreign program, the implications of the information are frequently ambiguous, and educated guesswork inevitably takes over. Richelson's account here will appeal more to fans of crime-scene investigations than to devotees of espionage thrillers. Not all analysts read the evidence the same way, especially when regional specialists and human-intelligence sources enter the picture. Disagreements inside the intelligence community are a regular occurrence—the controversy over Iraq's WMD program was hardly the first internal clash of its kind. Sometimes these bureaucratic disputes break along predictable agency lines—e.g., the State Department's "dovish" intelligence bureau versus the "hawkish" Defense Intelligence Agency—but sometimes not.

In his comprehensive review, Richelson finds many success stories, which have naturally received less public attention than the high-profile blunders. Even so, the failure rate is worrisome. Significantly, the majority of the consequential nuclear surprises have run in the opposite direction from our experience with Iraq—that is, our intelligence agencies have not been alarmist *enough*. Thus, the Soviet Union detonated its first nuclear weapon in 1949, roughly two years earlier than the consensus low-end U.S. forecast. In 1964, when Communist China unexpectedly used enriched uranium rather than plutonium in its initial nuclear test, our entire understanding of the scope and direction of Beijing's strategic program was cast into doubt. Nor did the intelligence community see or warn us of preparations for India's nuclear tests in 1974 and 1998.

THE GENERAL reader will not have an easy time of *Spying on the Bomb*. It is both lengthy and dense, and filled with an array of organizational acronyms, unfamiliar names, and technical details. Richelson has also refrained from providing a comprehensive introduction summarizing his findings, let alone a detailed set of lessons learned or policies recommended (other than a general plea for continued aggressive and inventive intelligence collection and analysis).

Still, anyone prepared to dive in will find Richelson a reliable and fair-minded guide. If he has a policy or bureaucratic axe to grind, it is not discernible in these pages; nor does he systematically attack the intelligence agencies for their historic failings or dismiss outright the Bush administration's treatment of intelligence before the Iraq war. Instead, *Spying On the Bomb* calmly and capably synthesizes the available public sources while supplying copious details, both in the text and in the accompanying footnotes, that leave the reader free to reach his own conclusions. True, Richelson's case studies, though painstakingly reconstructed, are uneven and incomplete—but that is because the evidence is uneven and incomplete. Much of the story is still secret; some portions of it are lost or forgotten.

The overarching lesson one takes away from this book is that gathering intelligence about nuclear weapons is not only inherently problematic but becoming more so. No magic technology will resolve or remove the major dilemmas and unknowns. It is not just that sensors often render readings that are open to different interpretations by competing analysts. It is also that countries pursuing covert nuclear-weapons programs can press back against U.S. surveillance by means of increasingly sophisticated campaigns of denial and deception, based in part on what they learn from each other and in part on what they learn from us—as they did via the intelligence information the U.S. released publicly in the run-up to and aftermath of the Iraq war.

Every one of Richelson's case studies is a sobering reminder of

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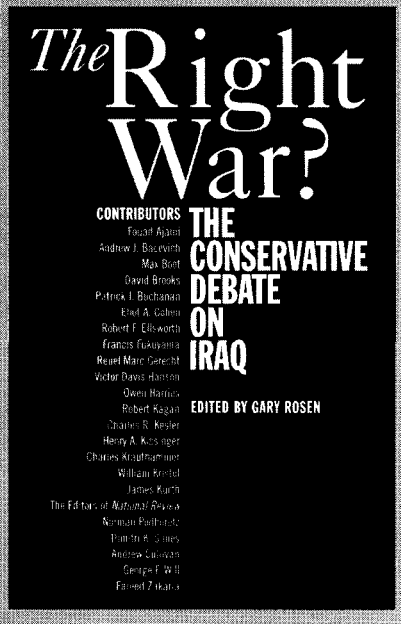

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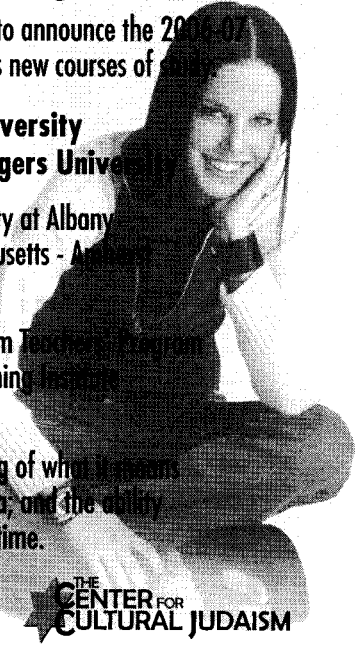

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how often the professionals in the nuclear-intelligence business have been at least a little wrong in a field where being a little wrong can have catastrophic consequences. In such an environment, neither technical resources nor cleverness can substitute for sound political judgment. With the stakes as high as they are, policies designed to counter the proliferation of nuclear weapons must be able to withstand the shock of surprise. Although we obviously need to avoid another Colin Powell moment, we need still more to avoid the far worse consequences that can follow if we overlook a nuclear bomb that is heading our way.

Michael S. Joyce

1942-2006

Farsighted counselor, openhearted benefactor,
vigilant and deeply cherished friend.

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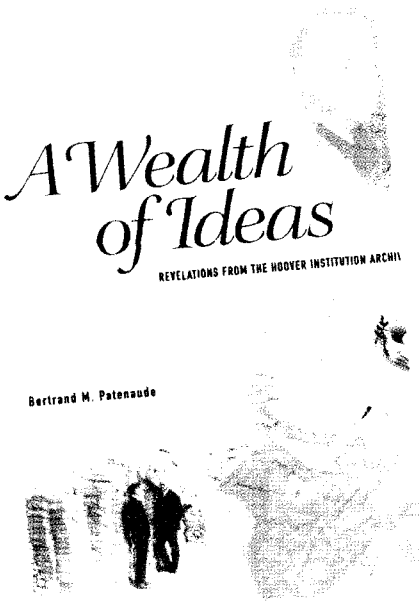

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Bertrand M. Patenaude is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. He is the author of The Big Show in Bololand *(Stanford University Press, 2002).*

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And, DonorsTrust provides a protective boundary that gives us confidence that our charitable investments will never be used to fund any group that goes against the American ideals of limited government, personal responsibility, and free enterprise.

We made a gift to charity and struck a blow for limited government!

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